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SALAR
DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

سالار روزنامہ بنگلور

Website: salarnews.in | www.magzter.com | 4 MARCH 2025 | TUESDAY | BENGALURU | 3 RAMADAN, 1446 AH | Vol 4 | Issue No 62 | Pages: 8

In Assembly's first speech, Guv hails K'taka dvpt model

He refuted claims that guarantees are hindering development

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Karnataka's unique development model is being studied by economists and universities worldwide, said Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot on Monday. Addressing the joint session of the State Legislature at Vi-dhana Soudha, he highlighted that the model focuses on people-centred economic, social, and cultural governance.

Gehlot noted that global experts have extensively studied Karnataka's approach. "Oxford University de-scribed it as 'Shining a Light in the Darkness' and 'A Blueprint for the World' in its Human Rights Hub blog. The UN head also praised our programmes during a visit to the state," he stated.

Defending the state's ambitious welfare schemes, the Governor refuted claims that they would hinder Karnataka's development. "Despite predictions, the government has proven them wrong," he said, pointing to the state's economic growth, increasing income, and record private investments.

Gehlot also highlighted the reduction in inequality due to effective welfare implementation, with Karna-taka being second in foreign direct investment (FDI) and experiencing strong GST growth. He added that the number of suicides among farmers had significantly reduced due to these schemes.

The Governor emphasised the importance of the Indian Constitution, crafted by Babasaheb Ambedkar, in ensuring equitable social and economic development. He pointed out that over Rs 52,000 crore is allo-cated annually for guarantee schemes, benefiting millions through cash transfers and subsidies. Karnataka is also on track to become a USD 1 trillion economy, with a focus on healthcare, education, sanitation, and sustainable agriculture. Fiscal management has been strong, with the state's revenue collections growing by 13% in 2024-25. Additionally, Karnataka ranks second in GST collections among Indian states. The Governor reassured that law and order remains stable, with no major issues in the past 19 months, and the police are actively combating rising cybercrimes. He also committed to completing pending irri-gation projects soon. *—PTI*

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Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot being welcomed by CM Siddaramaiah and DyCM DK Shivakumar as he arrives to address a joint session before the Budget session of the Assembly in Bengaluru ***PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD***

After recliners, MLAs to get massage chairs in Assembly

BENGALURU 3 MARCH

The Karnataka Legislative Assembly introduced 15 recliner chairs, including two massage chairs, in the Assembly lounge to help MLAs and MLCs take post-lunch naps during the ongo-ing budget session. As-sembly Speaker UT Khader had proposed the initiative to curb the recurring issue of legislators leaving Vidhana Soudha after lunch and failing to return for afternoon proceedings, affecting quorum and partic-ipation. "To address this, we have rented recliners so legislators can rest and return refreshed for the session," Khader said. The recliners will be removed once the session concludes. Khader defended the move citing earlier initiatives such as providing free breakfast and lunch at Vidhana Soudha, which re-portedly improved attendance by ensuring legislators remained within the premises. *—Salar News*

SANS CENSORSHIP

SC asks Centre to regulate social media content

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Supreme Court has directed the Centre to draft guidelines regulating social media content, following the controversy surrounding the 'India's Got Latent' show, where YouTuber Ranveer Allahbadia and comedi-an Samay Raina used explicit sexual references.

Any draft regulatory mechanism, the court said, could then be brought in the public domain to invite sug-gestions from all the stakeholders before taking a legislative or judicial measure on the subject.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh stressed that vulgar language should not be consid-ered talent and called for "limited regulatory measures" to be implemented. They emphasised that hu-mour should be family-friendly and avoid offensive language.

Justice Kant noted that while there should not be unnecessary censorship, there must be some control to ensure that social media content is appropriate.

The Centre was instructed to put forward a draft regulatory framework, seek public feedback, and en-gage with all stakeholders on the matter.

In a separate case, the Supreme Court also agreed to examine a petition concerning the blocking of so-cial media accounts or content without informing the creator.

The plea challenged Rule 16 of the Information Technology (Procedure and Safeguards for Blocking Ac-cess to Information) Rules, 2009, which allows authorities to block content without notice to the origina-tor. Senior advocate Indira Jaising argued that blocking without notice infringes upon natural justice rights. *—PTI*

> **Freedom of speech and expression is precious and needs to be protected. But vulgarity and perversity cannot be allowed to reach the next generation. Humour is something which the entire family can enjoy. Using filthy language is not talent**
>
> —Supreme Court

Jaishankar to visit UK, Ireland from 4 March

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will embark on a six-day visit to the UK and Ireland, starting Tuesday, aimed at enhancing bilateral cooperation. His first stop will be London for discussions with British counterpart David Lammy, focusing on various bilateral and global issues, including the ongoing Ukraine conflict. The talks will also revisit the ambitious India-UK free trade deal, recently relaunched during British Trade Secretary Jonathan Reynolds' visit to New Delhi. Alongside Lammy, Jaishankar will meet other dignitaries and engage with the Indian community. Jaishankar will then proceed to Ireland from 6-7 March for discussions with Irish counterpart Simon Harris, further solidifying India's ties with both nations. *—PTI*

Shame: Mandaviya on Rohit's body shaming row

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya lashed out at Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed for ques-tioning India captain Rohit Sharma's captaincy and fitness levels, terming it "deeply shameful" and "outright pathetic." Mandaviya wrote on X, "Remarks made by leaders from these parties, indulging in body shaming and questioning an athlete's place in the team, are not only deeply shameful but also outright pathetic." Shama caused a stir on social media in her now-deleted post, where she wrote, "Rohit Sharma is fat for a sportsman! Need to lose weight!" Acknowledging her comments were out of line, Congress had asked Shama to delete the post from X. *—PTI*

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Have babies quickly after wedding: Stalin tells TN

NAGAPATTINAM, 3 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday favoured young people having children immediately following marriage and said a higher population appeared to be the criterion to get more MPs. Addressing a wedding, Stalin, also the DMK president, said that years ago, newlyweds were advised to not have children immediately following marriage. However, the same thing must not be advised now and also, there was no need for that. It is because a situation has now arisen, according to which only a higher population would ensure more MPs as the delimitation exercise would be on the basis of population, Stalin said. *—PTI*

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HC stays FIR against Buch in stock market fraud case

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

The Bombay High Court on Monday directed Maharashtra's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) not to act on an order until 4 March, which had directed the agency to file an FIR against former Sebi Chairperson Madhabi Puri Buch and five others over alleged stock market fraud and regulatory violations. The order, passed on 1 March by a special court, stems from a 1994 incident involving the listing of a company on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE).

- Buch, along with BSE MD Sundararaman Ramamurthy and others, filed pleas seeking to quash the special court's order, claiming it was illegal and arbitrary.

Buch, along with BSE MD Sundararaman Ramamurthy and others, filed pleas seeking to quash the special court's order, claiming it was illegal and arbitrary. They argued that the complainant, media reporter Sapan Shrivastava, failed to present a prima facie case, and that there was no requirement for Sebi's NOC for the listing at the time. They also con-tested the complainant's credibility, calling him a habitual filer of vexatious complaints.

The special court's order found prima facie evidence of regulatory lapses, ordering a probe by the ACB. The Sebi and BSE have condemned the application, calling it "frivo-lous." The court will hear the pleas on 4 March, and until then, the ACB has been in-structed not to proceed with the investigation. *—PTI*

Shahzadi Khan ***PHOTO: X***

Indian woman executed in Abu Dhabi

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

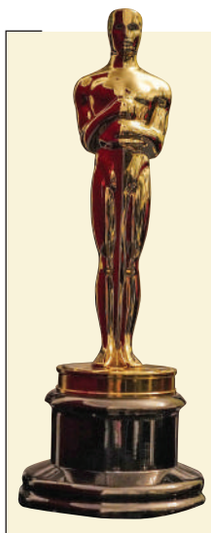
An Indian woman on death row in Abu Dhabi for the alleged murder of a four-month-old child has been executed on 15 February, the Delhi High Court hearing her father's plea about her well-being was in-formed on Monday.

Shahzadi Khan was handed over to the Abu Dhabi police on 10 February, 2023 and was sentenced to death on 31 July, 2023. She was lodged in the Al Wathba jail.

Shabbir Khan, a resident of Uttar Pradesh, said there was "profound uncertainty" regarding his daugh-ter's situation and his repeated applications to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) for clarification were fruitless.

The plea further alleged that Shahzadi was inadequately represented before the local courts in the case and she was pressured into confessing, leading to the imposition of the death penalty on her. The Centre's counsel told the court that the Embassy officials and the petitioner were in touch and ar-rangements were being made so that the family could attend their daughter's last rites in Abu Dhabi. The plea said the woman travelled to Abu Dhabi in December 2021 after obtaining a legal visa. In August 2022, her employer gave birth to a son for whom Shahzadi was employed as a caregiver. On 7 December, 2022, the infant received routine vaccinations and died that evening, it said.

The man claimed that the infant's parents refused consent for a post-mortem. *—PTI*



AND THE OSCAR GOES TO...

The 97th Academy Awards shocked Hollywood and the world, with the biggest winner of the night being 'Anora', which took home five of the six awards it was nominated for. Host Conan O'Brien delighted Indian fans with his 'namaskar' greeting. Halle Berry and Adrien Brody recreated their controversial 2003 kiss, sparking plenty of buzz. Here are the big winners:

Best Picture / Best Original Screenplay: 'Anora'

Best Actor: Adrien Brody, 'The Brutalist'

Best Actress: Mikey Madison, 'Anora'

Best Director: Sean Baker, 'Anora'

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Mayawati expels nephew from BSP

LUCKNOW, 3 MARCH

BSP Chief Mayawati has expelled her nephew Akash Anand from the party, a day after removing him from all key positions. Mayawati stated that Akash's response to her decision was "selfish and arrogant" and claimed he was under the influence of his father-in-law, Ashok Siddharth, rather than focusing on the party's interests. She added that Akash should "repent and show maturity" for his actions.

Akash was relieved of his responsibilities in a BSP meeting on Sunday, and Mayawati appointed Anand Kumar and Rajya Sabha MP Ramji Gautam as national coordinators in his place. She also declared that she would not name a successor during her lifetime.

In response, Akash expressed respect for Mayawati's decision, calling it a "patthar ki lakeer" (carved in stone). He vowed to continue working for the party and the Bahujan movement, describing it as a fight for the self-respect of Dalits and deprived communities. Akash criticised his political rivals, asserting that the movement would not be suppressed and that many like him would continue to fight for it. *—PTI*

WILDLIFE DAY

After Kuno, Gujarat to get cheetahs too

SASAN, 3 MARCH

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the expansion of cheetah reintroduction efforts to include Banni Grasslands in Gujarat and Gandhisagar Sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh during the seventh meeting of the National Board of Wildlife (NBWL) in Sasan.

This follows the successful reintroduction of African cheetahs at Kuno National Park, where the first two batches, comprising a total of 20 cheetahs from Namibia and South Africa, were released in 2022 and early 2023.

While specific details regarding the number of cheetahs to be introduced in the new areas remain un-confirmed, the Prime Minister's announcement marks a significant step in the transcontinental translo-=cation project, which aims to enhance biodiversity in India.

Banni Grasslands, a 2,500 sq km protected area in Kutch, boasts a rich array of wildlife, while Gan-hisagar Sanctuary is home to diverse species like wild dogs, leopards, and chinkaras.

Modi also unveiled the results of India's first riverine dolphin estimation, revealing a population of 6,327 dolphins across 28 rivers in eight states. This initiative demonstrates the govern-ment's commitment to wildlife conservation, with Uttar Pradesh leading in numbers, followed by Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam. The Prime Minister called for increased awareness and community involve-ment in dolphin conservation efforts.

Modi also went on a lion safari at Gir Wildlife Sanctuary in Junagadh district, on the occasion of the World Wildlife Day. Modi laid the foundation stone for the National Referral Centre-Wildlife at Junagadh and announced the 16th Asiatic lion population estimation to be carried out in May this year.. *—PTI*

PM Narendra Modi during lion safari at Gir Wildlife Sanctuary, on World Wildlife Day in Gujarat's Junagadh on Monday ***PHOTO: PTI***

PHOTO: ANI

4 killed in Bengaluru-Chennai expressway accident

KOLAR, 3 MARCH

A major accident on the yet-to-be-inaugurated Bengaluru-Chennai Expressway claimed the lives of four individuals late Sunday night, with another four sustaining injuries. The collision occurred near Kuppanahalli in Bangarpet taluk around 11.45pm, when an Innova car collided head-on with a motorcycle travelling in the opposite direction. According to Shantraraju KM, Superintendent of Police for the KGF police district, the motorbike rider was at fault for using the wrong track on the divided highway. The deceased are Mahesh (55), Rathnamma (60), Uditha (3), all from Kammasandra in KGF taluk, along with the motorcyclist, Srinath (30) from DK Hally in Bangarpet taluk. *—Salar News*

Cong worker held for kidnapping realtor

BELAGAVI, 3 MAR

Manjula Ramaganatti, a resident of Gokak taluk, was arrested and taken to Hindalaga jail for her alleged involvement as the ringleader in the kidnapping of realtor Basavaraj Ambi. The incident occurred on February 14, 2025, when Ambi was abducted from Rajapur and held for a ransom of Rs 5 crore at a farmhouse near the Bagalkot district border. The kidnappers contacted Ambi's wife, threatening his life if she alerted the authorities. Following a swift investigation, Belagavi police apprehended six members of the gang, who implicated Manjula. She was subsequently arrested at her home in Konnur village. The local Congress party's women's block president, Kalpana Joshi, clarified that Manjula has no affiliation with the party, neither holding a position nor even primary membership. *—Salar News*

Unidentified pedestrian killed in B'luru bus accident

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

An unidentified pedestrian was killed after being struck by a Bengaluru Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) bus while crossing the road near Gundappa Circle under the Jalahalli traffic police jurisdiction on Sunday evening. The accident occurred around 7.45pm on the Hennur-Bagalur Main Road. The victim, believed to be between 35 and 40 years old, was crossing when the bus hit him. Traffic police responded promptly, conducting an inspection of the scene before transferring the body to Yelahanka Government Hospital for a post-mortem examination The identity of the deceased is being investigated. Meanwhile, the police are also determining whether negligence on the part of the BMTC driver contributed to the accident. *—Salar News*

Man held for allegedly murdering wife over money

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

A 58-year-old man has been arrested in Anekal for allegedly murdering his wife after she denied him money for alcohol. The victim, identified as Nukalamma, 45, was killed in their Gudnahalli home on Sunday night. Reports indicate Gauri, the suspect, had issued a monetary demand due to his alleged alcohol addiction. When Nukalamma refused, he stormed out but returned later inebriated and confronted her. In a fit of rage, Gauri reportedly used an iron rod to strangle her. Neighbours, alerted by the commotion, discovered Nukalamma's lifeless body and notified the police. Gauri initially fled but has been apprehended as investigations continue. *—Salar News*

BJP calls Governor's address a 'pure lie'

BJP-JD(S) protest against Cong over move to 'curtail' Guv's powers in State

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

BJP criticised Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot's customary address delivered in Karnataka Assembly on Monday as a "pure lie".

The development has come to a "standstill" in Karnataka but the address prepared by the government says that the state is on the path of progress, the party claimed.

"If you listen to the Governor's address (you will know that) this government has wasted the Governor's time. The governor's address starts by saying that the state government has succeeded in ensuring speedy development in the state. The government made the Governor's address a pure lie," BJP state president BY Vijayendra told reporters here.

The speech did not have anything related to the development, he alleged.

The Leader of Opposition in the Assembly R Ashoka slammed the government saying "This is a zero government because there is zero development in the state".

Opposition parties, BJP and JD(S), staged a protest in Karnataka on Monday, alleging that the ruling Congress is attempting to curtail the powers of the Governor.

BJP leaders BY Vijayendra and R Ashoka with other MLAs protest against Congress ahead of Budget session *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

With placards in hand, opposition leaders marched from the Legislators' Home to Vidhana Soudha, expressing discontent over the government's alleged plan to strip the Governor of his role as Chancellor of universities in the state. Ashoka stated that the Constitution grants the Governor special powers and that attempts to diminish these powers undermine democracy. He accused the Congress of disrespecting the Constitution, which was framed by Baba Saheb Bhimrao Ambedkar, by proposing amendments that weaken the Governor's role.

Regarding a specific issue, Ashoka highlighted the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj University (Amendment) Bill, which seeks to remove the Governor's authority to appoint the university's Vice Chancellor. This amendment was passed in December 2022 amid opposition walkouts and was recently returned by Governor Thaawarchand Gehlot for further clarity from the government. *—PTI*

Silly criticism: MLAs defend recliners in Assembly

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Karnataka minister Dinesh Gundu Rao has defended the government's proposal to install recliner chairs in the state assembly. Rao said that unnecessary criticism should not happen and added that this is being done with no bad intentions.

He further said that some of the MLAs spend the whole day in the assembly without going back to their home. The main purpose of installing the recliners is to give them some rest after which they can work again.

"Silly criticism should not be done. This has been done with no bad intentions. Some of the MLAs spend the whole day in the Assembly. Instead of going back to their homes, the MLAs can take a little rest here and attend work again. It is to help MLAs to be available in the Assembly", Dinesh Gundu Rao said to ANI on Monday.

Another minister, Eshwara Khandre, came out in support

Dinesh Gundu Rao *PHOTO: ANI*

of the proposal that the BJP should be ashamed for criticising the proposal and it is being done to improve the productivity of the house.

"To improve the productivity, speaker proposed that and what is wrong in it? BJP is trying to politicise each and everything...they should be ashamed", he said while speaking to ANI.

Earlier, Karnataka Legislative Assembly speaker UT Khader had announced to install recliner chairs in the assembly session, which began on Monday for the legislators to rest. *—ANI*

K'taka mulls scheme after Manmohan

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar participating in the condolence motion in the legislatives Assembly lauded the contribution of late Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh for the growth of the country and Bengaluru through his economic reforms. "We have a plan to institute a permanent scheme in his name. He gave the country many schemes such as right to food, right to education and right to information," he added. He said, "Our State collects CSR amount of Rs 8,100 crores. It was Manmohan Singh who introduced the concept of CSR. Siddaramaiah led government has formed a committee under my leadership to set up 2000 Karnataka Public Schools with the help of CSR funds." *—Salar News*

'DKS WILL BE CM'

CM, DKS play it cool over Moily's remark

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday made it clear that he will go by the directives of the Congress high command, whose decision is final on leadership change in the State.

The CM was reacting to veteran Congress leader Veerappa Moily's statement regarding Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar taking over as chief minister.

"I'm saying once again that the high command will decide. What Moily or someone else opined is not important, whatever the high command says is final," Siddaramaiah said.

Asked about party leaders indulging in speculation on CM change in public, despite instructions from AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge against it, he said, "I will go by the high command's directions."

Moily said that no one can prevent Shivakumar from becoming the CM of the State, as it is a "settled matter".

CM Siddaramaiah and DycM DK Shivakumar greet each other as they arrive at Vidhana Sodha on Monday *PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Refusing to comment on Moily's statement, Shivakumar earlier on Monday called it his personal opinion.

Congress MLA Basavaraju V Shivaganga too on Sunday said that Shivakumar will become the chief minister by December.

Reacting to Moily's statements, Cooperation Minister K N Rajanna on Monday said Veerappa Moily is a senior leader and he has expressed his personal opinion, but ultimately the Congress high command will decide.

PWD Minister Satish Jarkiholi said Moily and several others too have spoken on this issue of CM change, but ultimately AICC will decide.

Industries Minister MB Patil said Moily is a former chief minister, former union minister and a Congress Working Committee member. AICC high command will look into his statement and discuss with him if required.

Taking a dig at the ruling party, BJP State president BY Vijayendra said there are no doubts about fast-paced political developments in Karnataka in the days ahead, as the fight for the CM's chair in Congress party is intensifying day-by-day. *—PTI*

IPS Katiyar transferred after file tampering claims

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

IPS officer Vartika Katiyar was on Monday transferred with immediate effect days after she reportedly accused her senior colleague of "planting" files in her office.

The 2010 batch IPS officer was serving as the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Internal Security Division, Bengaluru.

"Vartika Katiyar, IPS (2010), Deputy Inspector General of Police, Internal Security Division, Bengaluru is transferred with immediate effect and posted until further orders as Deputy Inspector General of Police & Additional Commandant General, Home Guards & Ex-officio Additional Director, Civil Defence, Bengaluru in the downgraded vacant post," an official notification dated March 3 stated.

The order issued by the Karnataka government, however, does not specify any reason for the immediate transfer.

Last month, Katiyar lodged a

Vartika Katiyar *PHOTO: FB*

- The 2010 batch IPS officer was serving as the Deputy Inspector General of Police, Internal Security Division, Bengaluru.

written complaint against 2000-batch IPS officer Roopa D Moudgil with Chief Secretary Shalini Rajneesh, alleging that two junior police officers entered her office by taking keys from the control room during her absence. She alleged that they acted at the behest of her senior colleague and "planted" files in her office. *—PTI*

FIR against M'luru MLA, for 'assault' on Cong worker

MANGALURU, 3 MARCH

An FIR has been registered against 12 individuals, including Mangalore City South MLA Vedavyasa Kamath, following an alleged assault on a Congress worker during a religious event at the Sri Krishna Bhajana Mandira near Shaktinagara, police said on Monday.

The incident happened late Sunday night, following which a complaint was lodged at the Kankanady police station here, they said.

According to the complaint lodged by Congress worker Yashwanth Prabhu, the incident occurred while he was assisting as a volunteer in welcoming guests for the Brahma Kalashotsava ceremony.

Prabhu alleged that upon arrival, MLA Kamath confronted him, asking, "What work do you have here after throwing stones at temples?", a remark he perceived as politically motivated.

When he objected, a verbal altercation ensued, following which a group of individuals, including Ashwith Kottari, Mani, and Jayaprakash, allegedly attacked him, tearing his shirt.

Prabhu also claimed in his report that Jayaprakash threatened his life.

Reacting to the complaint, BJP spokesperson Raj Gopal Rai dismissed the allegations as false, accusing the Congress of orchestrating a smear campaign against BJP leaders.

The BJP further claimed that during the incident, a member of the Scheduled Caste community accompanying the MLA was assaulted by Congress workers. *—PTI*

HC QUASHES CASE AGAINST SANJANA GALRANI

BENGALURU, 3 MAR

Actress Sanjana Galrani has received relief from the High Court regarding an alleged drug-related case against her. In a ruling dated 25 March, 2024, the court quashed the case initiated after her arrest by the Central Crime Branch of the Bengaluru Police on 8 September, 2020. The High Court Bench, led by Justice Hemanth Chandangoudar, stated that the petitioners should not be tried for earlier offences and highlighted the necessity for separate FIRs to be registered. The court concluded that continuing criminal proceedings would constitute an abuse. Sanjana Galrani is known for her roles in Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, and Malayalam cinema. *—ANI*

CM blames contractors for pending bills

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday attributed the growing backlog of pending bills to contractors, claiming that tenders were floated without budgetary provisions, leading to the completion of works without adequate funds allocated.

Responding to contractors' allegations of bribery, Siddaramaiah denied any involvement in taking commissions for clearing bills or releasing funds. "No one should either pay or receive a bribe. I have never taken money for clearing bills," he stated. He emphasised that contractors should not engage in bribing officials, adding that both the recipient and the payer of bribes are criminals.

- He denied any involvement in taking commissions for clearing bills.

The Chief Minister confirmed that the contractors' association had requested the payment of Rs 15,000 crore from the Rs 30,000 crore in pending dues by April, but he made it clear that such an amount could not be released without considering the state's financial condition. "We have no intention to decline payments, but we must first assess our financial situation," he said.

Regarding the upcoming budget, Siddaramaiah, who holds the finance portfolio, mentioned that discussions would begin on 7 March. The budget discussions will continue until 19 March, with the Chief Minister replying to the debate on March 20 in the Legislative Council.

When asked about public expectations, Siddaramaiah urged patience, stating, "The budget is a secret document until it is presented. We cannot disclose its contents before then." *—PTI*

KANNADA PRIDE HURT

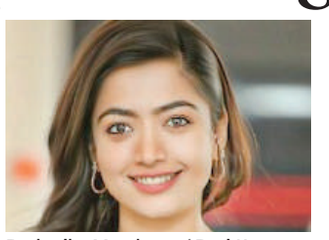
Rashmika's film festival rebuff upsets Cong leaders

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Congress Mandya MLA and a Kannada activist Ravi Kumar has voiced his ire against actress Rashmika Mandanna for declining the invitation to attend Film Festival in Bengaluru and for calling herself as someone from Hyderabad.

Popularly known as Ravi Ganiga, Kumar said Mandanna hailed from Kodagu district of Karnataka and debuted in a Kannada film 'Kirik Party' but had refused to attend the film festival due to lack of time.

"One of our MLAs went to her house and invited her several times but she spoke so rude about Kannada despite growing



Rashmika Mandanna/ Ravi Kumar

PHOTO: PTI

from Kannada land. Shouldn't she be taught a lesson or not?" Ganiga asked. The remarks gain significance at a time when the ruling Congress is upset with the film fraternity over the poor turnout at the Bengaluru Film Festival.

Warning the Kannada Film Chamber of Commerce, the MLA said he will write to the Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister asking them to withdraw the subsidies given to the film industry.

Karnataka Rakshana Vedike convener TA Narayana Gowda also condemned the actress calling her a betrayer of her home state. *—PTI*

BBMP to expedite ID card distribution for street vendors

BENGALURU, 3 MARCH

Tushar Girinath, Chief Commissioner of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), has ordered officials to expedite the distribution of identity cards to 27,000 street vendors identified across the city's eight zones.

During a meeting at the BBMP headquarters, Girinath emphasised the need to finalise the format of the identity cards and ensure timely delivery. Vendors with these cards will be permitted to operate in designated vending zones. Girinath reviewed the ongoing survey to identify out-of-school children within BBMP limits and urged officials to complete this task and assess applications for welfare schemes to guarantee that benefits reach beneficiaries. *—Salar News*

Monastery leader missing after drunken accident

KALABURGI, 3 MARCH

The head of the Shankaralingeshwar Sansthan Hiremath in Udachana village, Shantaliga Shivacharya, has gone missing following a drunken driving incident on 8 January in the neighbouring Indi taluk. Witnesses reported that he crashed his vehicle and was later found wandering the streets of Salotagi village in a dishevelled state. Despite paying a fine for the accident, the incident was largely ignored until now.

Upon returning to the monastery that night, Shivacharya faced confrontation from local villagers, who expressed their dismay at his behaviour. He promised to address their concerns the following morning but fled before dawn, locking the monastery and taking

PHOTO: SALAR

with him money, jewellery, and essential school documents. Reports suggest he is currently hiding in a remote location while still managing school activities, allegedly involving himself in illegal appointments and bribe-taking. Village leaders have called for Shivacharya's immediate arrest and the reopening of the monastery. Gaddeppa Maitre, a local leader, stated, "His actions have severely damaged the dignity of monastery." *—Salar News*

India, Belgium explore defence ties in Indo-Pacific

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

India and Belgium on Monday discussed the possibility of bilateral maritime security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and looked at ways to enhance defence industrial ties. Ways to bolster India-Belgium defence engagement figured prominently at a meeting between Belgium's Princess Astrid and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The two sides also agreed to explore the setting up of an institutionalised defence cooperation mechanism between the two nations. Belgian Defence Minister Theo Francken was also part of the Belgian delegation. Princess Astrid is leading an Economic Mission to India that comprises top ministers, business leaders. *—PTI*

3 more held for harassing Khadse's daughter

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

The Jalgaon police on Monday arrested two more men and detained a minor boy in connection with the harassment of Union minister Raksha Khadse's daughter and some of her friends, an official said. With this, four people have been apprehended so far in the case. Seven people have been named in the FIR, registered on the complaint of Khadse at Muktainagar police station in Maharashtra's Jalgaon district in connection with the incident that occurred at Sant Muktai Yatra in Kothali village on 28 February. The seven have been charged with stalking and other offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, while Information Technology Act provisions have been invoked since they tried to take pictures and videos of the girls without permission, according to police. During the probe, the police found the accused allegedly misbehaved with several girls and even clashed with the bodyguards accompanying them. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Omar: Special status resolution not rejected yet

JAMMU, 3 MARCH

The resolution on special status passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in its first sitting last year has not been rejected by the Central government, Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said on Monday. He asserted that there was no need to bring any other resolution on Article 370, which was abrogated in August 2019. "What we have to do was done in the first assembly session in November, 2024. The resolution is still holding." Abdullah said, in response to rumours that there may a fresh resolution to condemn the abrogation of Article 370. "The resolution was not rejected and the fact of the matter is that it is still holding so there is no need to talk further on this," he said. *—PTI*

Andhra CM unveils ₹1K cr hydrogen plant in Tirupati

AMARAVATI, 3 MARCH

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Monday virtually inaugurated Hero Future Energies' (HFE) Rs 1,000-crore green hydrogen plant at Rockman Industries in Tirupati. The HFE plant blends green hydrogen with Piped Natural Gas (PNG) and Liquefied Natural Gas (LPG) for industrial heating. Equipped with a 300 kW PEM electrolyser, the plant is powered by a 1.1 MWp rooftop solar plant, which can blend green hydrogen up to 10 per cent in LPG and three per cent in PNG. Employing 2,000 people, the HFE plant's annual green hydrogen output of 25 TPA can also be expanded up to 54 TPA, said an official release. *—PTI*

Have kids immediately, says Stalin amid delimitation row

He urged parties to attend 5 March meet to address the issue

NAGAPATTINAM, 3 MARCH

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Monday favoured young people having children immediately following marriage and said a higher population appeared to be the criterion to get more MPs.

Addressing a wedding, Stalin, also the DMK president, said that years ago, newlyweds were advised to not have children immediately following marriage.

However, the same thing must not be advised now and also, there was no need for that. It is because a situation has now arisen, according to which only a higher population would ensure more MPs as the delimitation exercise would be on the basis of population, Stalin said. Tamil Nadu paid attention to population control and succeeded and that was the reason for the state's plight today, he added.

Tamil Nadu CM MK Stalin said that issue is all about Tamil Nadu and its interests and rights **PHOTO: PTI**

Further, he said that the question of delimitation is related to Tamil Nadu's rights and protecting its interests and hence, the matter must not be evaluated politically.

The union government is planning to implement the three-language policy through compulsion and similarly in the delimitation exercise, it is attempting to cut down the number of seats for Tamil Nadu, Stalin alleged, addressing the function here.

Against this background an all party meeting has been organised on 5 March on the proposed delimitation exercise and most parties out of 40 have confirmed their participation and a few others have said they would not be taking part. Appealing to such parties, the Chief Minister said they should not evaluate the issue through the prism of politics. BJP and Tamil State Congress (Moopanar) were the key parties that have said they would not take part in the meeting.

The issue is all about Tamil Nadu and its interests and rights and hence parties that have declared that they would not take part should also participate, he appealed. *—PTI*

WITHIN 24 HOURS

TMC accuses EC of 'epic' voter scam

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Trinamool Congress on Monday expressed dissatisfaction with the Election Commission's response on the duplication of voter card numbers, saying the poll panel must accept the error within 24 hours.

TMC Rajya Sabha Parliamentary Party Leader Derek O'Brien said if the EC fails to do it, the party would release more documents related to the issue on Tuesday morning. O'Brien, along with TMC Rajya Sabha deputy leader Sagarika Ghose and Lok Sabha MP Kirti Azad, displayed lists with details of voter ID cards with the same EPIC number.

"We want only residents of a state to vote in that state. Voters will not be allowed to vote as their votes will be cast by people with identical EPIC numbers," O'Brien said.

"These people will be sneaked in from other states to vote. This is unacceptable,"

Derek O'Brien **PHOTO: ANI**

he added. Amid reports flagging issuance of identical voter card numbers to electors in two different states, the EC on Sunday said it would rectify the issue and also update its technology-driven platform.

The EC asserted that while the elector photo identity card numbers of some of the voters "may be identical", the other details, including demographic details, assembly constituency and polling booth, are different.

Terming it an "Epic Scam", O'Brien alleged that the poll panel issued the statement after TMC announced that it was going to hold a press conference on the issue. *—PTI*

Women get ₹13,363 cr in J'khand Budget

RANCHI, 3 MARCH

The Jharkhand government on Monday presented a Rs 1.45 lakh-crore budget for 2025-26, allocating a whopping Rs 62,844 crore for social welfare programmes aimed at helping the poor, women and other vulnerable groups.

For its popular Jharkhand Mukhyamantri Maiya Samman Yojana that aims to enhance financial security and well-being of women in the age bracket of 18-50 years, it allocated Rs 13,363 crore. Additionally, Rs 5,000 crore will be allocated to a government scheme aimed at providing free electricity.

The budget provides for an outlay of Rs 62,844 crore for the social sector and Rs 13,363 crore for Maiyan Samman financial aid to women, Kishore said.

Under the industrial policy, the government aims to attract Rs 20,000 crore in investment. The government also proposed to set up law colleges in Hazaribag, Ranchi, Dhanbad, Dumka and Palamu. The government proposed the launch of a helicopter shuttle service from Ranchi to religious destinations such as Deoghar, Basukinath, Rajrappa, Itkhori, and tourist spots like Betla National Park, Patratu Valley and Sahibganj.

The government plans to construct glass bridges at popular tourist destinations such as Dasam, Hundru, Netarjat, and Patratu in 2025-26 fiscal.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren with wife and JMM MLA Kalpana Soren in Ranchi **PHOTO: PTI**

The opposition BJP termed the budget as "directionless," saying it has "nothing for the tribals, farmers, labourers and youths." *—PTI*

Jharkhand Finance Minister Radha Krishna Kishore presents the Budget 2025-26 **PHOTO: PTI**

Women empowerment focus in Bihar's ₹3.17L cr Budget

PATNA, 3 MARCH

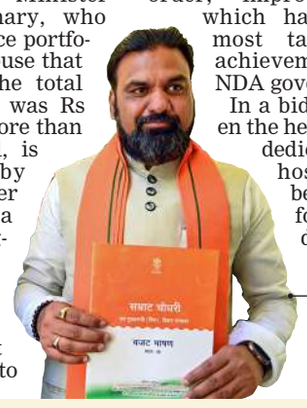
With Bihar elections scheduled later this year, the Nitish Kumar government on Monday presented a comprehensive budget of Rs 3.17 lakh-crore, unveiling key initiatives focused on women's empowerment, farmer support, infrastructure development and prioritising student welfare.

Presenting the budget on the floor of the assembly, Deputy Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary, who holds the finance portfolio, told the House that the budget, the total size of which was Rs 38,169 crore more than the last fiscal, is inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'margdarshan' (guidance) and the CM's 'netritva' (leadership).

The government has also decided to increase the scholarship amount from Rs 1,000 to Rs 2,000 per month for students from Class 1 to Class 10, he said, adding that the government will also ensure the opening of at least one degree college in all 534 blocks in the state.

He said Rs 20,335 crore has been allocated for the health sector, while Rs 17,831 crore will be given to the home department, which is responsible for law and order, improvement in which has been the most talked about achievement of the NDA government.

In a bid to strengthen the health sector, a dedicated cancer hospital has been proposed for Begusarai district. *—PTI*



Samrat Choudhry. **PHOTO: PTI**

CH'GARH BUDGET: PETROL TO BE RE 1 CHEAPER

RAIPUR, 3 MARCH

The Chhattisgarh government on Monday decided to reduce Value Added Tax (VAT) on petrol from 1 April and proposed substantial funding for welfare schemes related to food security, women, agriculture as it presented a Rs 1,65,000-crore budget for the fiscal 2025-26.

The government has decided to cut VAT on petrol from 1 April which will lower the prices of the fuel by Re 1 per litre, Finance Minister OP Choudhary announced while presenting the budget in the assembly. A fund will be created for future liabilities of pension of government employees, while a sum of Rs 10,000 crore will be allocated boosting farm prosperity, he said. Cess on stamp duty on immovable property transactions will be removed, while a survey will be undertaken for inter-linking key rivers in the state, Choudhary maintained. *—PTI*

M'RASHTRA TABLES ₹6K CR SUPPLEMENTARY DEMANDS

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

Maharashtra government tabled supplementary demands worth Rs 6,486 crore on the first day of the budget session of the state assembly on Monday.

Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, who holds the finance portfolio, presented the supplementary demands, which are additional funds sought by the government over the budgetary allocation.

Of the demands worth Rs 6,486 crore, Rs 2,133.25 crore were for schemes sponsored by the Centre.

The budget session of the state assembly began on Monday, and the budget will be presented on 10 March. The supplementary demands include Rs 3,006.28 crore for the rural development department, Rs 1,688.74 for the industry, power and labour departments and Rs 590.28 crore for the urban development department. *—PTI*

'Friend' held in Haryana Cong worker's murder case

CHANDIGARH, 3 MARCH

Haryana Police on Monday arrested a "friend" of Congress worker Himani Narwal for allegedly strangling her after a fight at her home and later dumping her body in a suitcase.

Narwal's body was found stuffed in a suitcase in Rohtak on Saturday, leading to the formation of a special investigation team (SIT) to probe the murder.

Additional DGP K K Rao said the accused, Sachin, hails from Jhajjar, where he runs a mobile phone shop, and was arrested in Delhi.

Rao said it was a murder with few clues.

According to police, Sachin strangled Himani with a wired mobile phone charger, killing her on the spot.

""For the past one-and-half years, the accused was in contact with the woman through social media and also used to visit her home. *—PTI*

Clashes erupt during SFI's strike in WB varsities

KOLKATA, 3 MARCH

Activists of various Leftist student bodies and Trinamool Congress Chhatra Parishad (TMCP) engaged in clashes across West Bengal on Monday during a strike called by CPI(M)'s student wing SFI on university campuses in the state demanding the resignation of Education Minister Bratya Basu.

Clashes were reported between members of the TMC's students' wing and Leftist activists of AIDSO and SFI in Medinipur town, Siliguri in Darjeeling district, Cooch Behar district and Panskura in Purba Medinipur district. Members of TMCP and the Leftist student bodies exchanged blows at Vidyasagar University and Medinipur College in Paschim Medinipur district, Panskura Banamali College in Purba Medinipur and North Bengal University in Siliguri as the TMCP activists tried to prevent the Leftist students from enforcing the strike and suspension of classes.

SFI members during a strike demanding the resignation of Education Minister Bratya Basu, at Jadavpur University, in Kolkata **PHOTO: PTI**

Classes were disrupted in several state-run higher educational institutions. Campuses of Jadavpur and Presidency universities in Kolkata wore a deserted look as common students, faculty members and other staffers stayed away while SFI members gathered on the campuses to enforce the day-long strike that began at 10am. *—PTI*

BCCI REACTS

Delete Rohit fat-shaming post: Cong to leader

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Congress on Monday reprimanded its spokesperson Shama Mohamed for fat-shaming Indian cricket team captain Rohit Sharma and asked her to delete her social media posts in which she made the comments and exercise greater caution in future.

In her now-deleted post, Mohamed said Sharma is "fat for a sportsman". "Need to lose weight! And of course the most unimpressive Captain India has ever had!" she said.

Responding to a post praising Sharma, Mohamed asked what was so world class about the current captain when compared to his predecessors like Saurav Ganguly, Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, MS Dhoni, Virat Kohli, Kapil Dev, Ravi Shastri and the rest.

Shama Mohamed; Rohit Sharma

PHOTOS: WIKIPEDIA/PTI

Congress' media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said, "Dr Shama Mohammed, National Spokesperson of the Indian National Congress, made certain remarks about a cricketing legend that do not reflect the party's position."

"The Indian National Congress holds the contributions of sporting icons in the highest regard and does not endorse any statements that undermine their legacy," Khera said.

TMC MP Saugata Roy on Monday backed Congress spokesperson Shama Mohamed's comments questioning Rohit Sharma's captaincy of the Indian cricket team. Meanwhile, BCCI Secretary Devajit Saikia said, "It's very unfortunate this kind of remarks come from such a person who is on a responsible post to our captain, on a meanwhile time when India is playing an ICC tournament and the team is all set to play Semi final."

"All the players are performing to their highest potential and results are visible. I hope individuals shall desist from making such derogatory statements for personal publicity sake at the cost of National Interest," he added. *—PTI*

AAP MLA under fire for sharing Session's picture

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Delhi Assembly Speaker Vijender Gupta on Monday warned AAP MLA Jarnail Singh of breach of privilege action for posting a picture of the ongoing House session on X and asked him to remove the image.

Singh, the MLA from Tilak Nagar constituency, later expressed regret for his action. However, the photo posted by him on the microblogging site was not immediately deleted.

"It is being seen for the first time in Delhi Assembly that House discussion was going on without the (presence of) ministers. Who will give a reply on behalf of the government," Singh said in his post while sharing a photo of the House sitting. He defended his action, saying when videos of the Assembly session can be posted online, why can't he share a photo of the House proceedings. The Speaker said that the live broadcast of proceedings was done with his permission. However, after some time, when some BJP MLAs said that the photo was not deleted the Assembly Speaker said that he would have to face breach of privilege and strict action would be taken against him if he did not delete the photo. *—PTI*

Vijender Gupta **PHOTO: ANI**

Renowned Kerala urologist found dead at farmhouse

KOCHI, 3 MARCH

Dr George P Abraham, a distinguished urologist, was discovered deceased at his farmhouse in Kerala's Nedumbassery. The 75-year-old's body was found hanging on Sunday night, prompting an investigation by local authorities. Dr Abraham was well-respected for his expertise in the surgical management of complex urological disorders and was affiliated with a prominent private hospital in Kochi. Notably, he had personally conducted over 2,500 renal transplant procedures throughout his career. Police have since transferred his body to a private hospital in Angamaly for further examination. The investigation into the circumstances surrounding his death is ongoing. *—PTI*

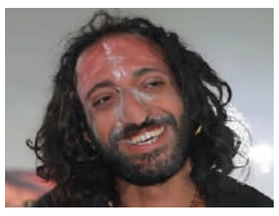


PHOTO: X

'IIT Baba' held with ganja in Jaipur, released on bail

JAIPUR, 3 MARCH

'IIT Baba' Abhay Singh was arrested from a hotel in the Shiprapath area with a small quantity of ganja, police here said on Monday. He was later granted bail, they added. Shiprapath SHO Rajendra Kumar Godara said the police received information about a video purporting to show Singh threatening to commit suicide circulating on social media. Acting on the information, the police reached the spot and questioned Singh. During the questioning, a small quantity of ganja was found with him. Singh, who burst into the limelight during the Maha Kumbh Mela – was booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act and subsequently released on bail. *—PTI*

Raipur mayor's son held for disruptive b'day celebrations

RAIPUR, 3 MARCH

Mrinak Choubey alias Mehul, the son of newly-elected Raipur mayor Meenal Choubey, along with four associates, was arrested following a viral video of their disruptive birthday celebration on a public road. The incident occurred outside the mayor's residence in Changorabhata at approximately 12.30am on Saturday, where they cut a cake and set off firecrackers, causing traffic disruption. Police filed a case under section 126(2) of the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita. All accused were later granted bail. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel highlighted double standards in the government's approach, noting the recent arrest of Congress workers for similar actions. Mayor Choubey acknowledged the mistake and vowed to prevent future incidents, following warnings from officials against obstructing roads for private events. *—PTI*

Foreigner booked for Lord Jagannath tattoo on thigh

BHUBANESWAR, 3 MARCH

A foreign woman's tattoo of Lord Jagannath on her thigh has sparked controversy in Odisha, resulting in police action. The tattoo, inked at a parlour in Bhubaneswar, went viral on social media, prompting protests from Jagannath devotees. A complaint was filed at Sahid Nagar police station, leading to a case being registered under Section 299 of the BNS Act for allegedly insulting religious sentiments. In response to the backlash, both the woman and the tattoo parlour owner issued public apologies. The woman expressed her remorse, stating she intended no disrespect and vowed to remove the tattoo once healed. The shop owner revealed staff had advised her against the placement, but she insisted on the thigh. *—PTI*

Maintain decency: SC allows Ranveer to air his show

Should be suitable for all ages, says court

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Supreme Court allowed podcaster Ranveer Allahbadia to air his "The Ranveer Show" subject to maintaining "morality and decency" and an undertaking that it was suitable for all ages.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh took note of Allahbadia's submission that the podcast was his only source of livelihood and around 280 people employed by him were dependent on the show.

The bench also extended the interim protection from arrest granted to Allahbadia till further orders.

Solicitor general Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and Maharashtra, Assam and Odisha, had urged the court not to modify the condition of not airing any show.

"Let him remain silent for sometime," he said.

The bench said fundamental rights were not served on a platter and came with certain restrictions. Justice Surya Kant pointed out that Samay Raina, one of the accused, went to Canada and spoke about the case.

"These youngsters may think that we are outdated but we know how to deal with them. Don't take the court lightly," the judge cautioned. The bench subsequently restrained Allahbadia from speaking about the case on his show.

The bench, however, refused to allow him to travel abroad for now and said his prayer would be considered once he joined the investigation.

Several FIRs were lodged against Allahbadia for his controversial remarks on parents and sex on the show 'India's Got Latent.' On 18 February, the court had granted interim protection from arrest to Allahbadia while saying he had "dirty mind" which put the society to shame. *—PTI*

Ranveer Allahbadia **PHOTO: X**

- The bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh refused to allow him to travel abroad for now and said his prayer would be considered once he joined the investigation

SC allows visually impaired people in judiciary

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Supreme Court on Monday held that visually impaired people cannot be denied opportunity of employment in judicial services.

A bench comprising justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan had reserved the judgement on six petitions, including a suo-motu case, on 3 December last year, over non-grant of quota to such candidates in judicial services in a few states.

The judgement paves the way for persons with the disabilities, who had participated in the selection process, to be considered for judicial service selection if they are eligible otherwise.

Justice Mahadevan said that persons with disabilities must not face any discrimination in their pursuit of judicial service recruitments and that the State must provide them affirmative action to ensure an inclusive framework.

The judgement said no candidate can be denied consideration solely on account of their disability.

The top court also set aside certain rules 6A and 7 of the Madhya Pradesh Services Examination (Recruitment and Conditions of Services) Rules 1994 to the extent they barred visually impaired and low vision candidates from judicial service. *—PTI*

SEBI ACT VIOLATION

ED conducts raids in ₹ 4,500 cr investment fraud

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The Enforcement Directorate on Monday said it conducted searches in a money laundering case linked to an alleged investment fraud of Rs 4,500 crore with about 50 lakh depositors by Pancard Clubs Limited (PCL), a Mumbai-based company and its former directors, promoters and others.

This is a case of alleged fraud through a collective investment scheme (CIS), in violation of the SEBI Act, where more than 50 lakh investors were allegedly duped of over Rs 4,500 crore.

The economic offences wing of the Mumbai Police had filed a case under the Maharashtra Protection of Interest of Depositors (in Financial Establishment) Act, 1999, against PCL and others. The ED took cognisance to file a case under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.

PCL and its directors "floated" various investment schemes of different durations, ranging from three to nine years, with a promise of hotel discounting, accidental insurance and other benefits including "high-rate" of returns against the deposits made by the public, "ignoring" prevailing norms of SEBI and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the ED said.

The ED seized "incriminating" documents bearing details of overseas assets - currently being operated by family members of the main accused and former director of the company late Sudhir Moraveker.

Some documentary "evidence" found during the raids show that "attempts were made to dispose of the assets, prima facie being part of the proceeds of crime, by the co-accused. *—PTI*

Rescue operation underway to trace workers trapped inside Telangana's partially collapsed Srisailam Left Bank Canal tunnel in Nagarkurnool on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Tunnel collapse: Rescue efforts on

NAGARKURNOOL, 3, MARCH

Rescue teams continue to grapple with challenging conditions to find and rescue eight engineers and labourers trapped in the Telangana tunnel collapse. Officials, on Monday said new locations are being inspected following a radar survey undertaken to find human presence.

Scientists from the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) in Hyderabad conducted a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey inside the tunnel to look for signs of human presence. The first search only yielded metals at these spots.

"They are trying at the other locations given by scientists. The scientists are ready to conduct GPR survey again at any other points," they said.

Rescue workers found the slush and water hampering their efforts. However, officials noted that with improving conditions the scientists are ready to carry out the survey again.

Chief Minister Revanth Reddy, after a visit to the site and discussion with rescue officials on Sunday assured all help towards ongoing rescue efforts. He had also said the rescue operations would gain momentum once the damaged conveyor belt which played a crucial role in clearing silt is expected to be restored by Monday.

Eight persons have been trapped under the collapsed roof of the Srisailam Left Bank Canal since 22 February and their exact location is not yet known. *—PTI*

Delhi HC says ban on smartphones in schools impractical, unworkable

THANE, 3 MARCH

The Delhi High Court said a complete ban on the use of smartphones by school students was an "undesirable and unworkable" approach and it should be regulated and monitored.

Justice Anup Jairam Bhambhani then issued guiding principles to balance the beneficial and deleterious effects of permitting the use of smartphones by school students.

The court said schools must educate students on responsible online behaviour, digital manners and the ethical use of smartphones. The students, must also be counselled that high levels of screen-time and social media engagement could lead to anxiety, diminished attention spans and cyber-bullying.

The court noted that phones served salutary purposes, including help in coordination between parents and children and ensuring their safety. "As a matter of policy students should not be barred from carrying smartphones to school but the use of smartphones in school must be regulated and monitored," it said.

Given the fast-paced advancement of technology, the policy should be regularly reviewed and revised. *—PTI*

Muhammed Shahabas **PHOTO: PTI**

Murder of Class 10 student in Kerala pre-planned: Cops

KOZHIKODE, 3 MARCH

The murder of a Class 10 student in Thamarassery was carried out with careful planning, the police said on Monday.

"Conversations from the students' WhatsApp group indicate that the attack was premeditated," a senior police officer said. He added that the psychological state of the accused students following the attack also needs to be assessed.

Police are also investigating whether any adults were involved in the attack amidst reports that the father of the main accused student has links to quotation gangs and smuggling networks.

Meanwhile, Iqbal, the father of the slain student, expressed his distress over the decision to allow the accused students to sit for their SSLC exams from the juvenile home.

"They should have been barred from exams for a year. Permitting them to write the exams now sends a message that no matter what they do, there will be no real consequences," he said.

Muhammed Shahabas suffered severe head injuries leading to his death. *—PTI*

DEMANDS CENTRE'S INTERVENTION

Fisherwomen and men protest in Ramanathapuram, Tamil Nadu, demanding the release of Indian fishermen detained in Sri Lanka **PHOTO: PTI**

Kulwant Singh Mannan **PHOTO:SGPC.NET**

SGPC condemns attack on Sikh businessman in Rishikesh

RISHIKESH, 3 MARCH

The Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) has strongly condemned the alleged attack on a Sikh businessman in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, where a mob reportedly vandalised his showroom on Sunday. The SGPC has urged the state government to conduct a thorough investigation and take strict action against the culprits.

A video of the incident circulating on social media shows Sikh traders being assaulted and their showrooms pelted with stones, causing significant damage, SGPC chief secretary Kulwant Singh Mannan said. He has written to Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and the police, demanding swift justice. *—Agencies*

LOCAL SUPERSTITION

Month-old-baby branded with hot iron rod 40 times to 'cure diseases'

BHUBANESWAR, 3 MARCH

A one-month-old baby boy was branded with a hot iron rod about 40 times to cure a disease in Odisha's Nabarangpur district following which he was admitted to a government hospital, officials said.

The incident took place in Phundelpada village in the Chandahandi block of the district.

Nabarangpur Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO) Dr Santosh Kumar Panda visited the hospital and said the infant's health condition is now stable. "There are about 30 to 40 branding spots on the belly and head of the child. There is a superstition that if a child is branded with hot metal, the child would be cured of diseases," he said.

The doctor said that the child had a fever, running a high temperature 10 days ago and was crying a lot. The family members believed that the child was under the influence of some evil spirit. Instead of seeking medical help, the family branded him believing that it would cure him. When the child fell seriously ill after the branding, he was admitted to the Umerkote Hospital.

Such practices have been going on in some areas for a long time, the CDMO said, adding that the health department decided to create awareness among the people to bring children to hospitals for treatment. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

- The doctor said the child had a fever 10 days ago and was crying a lot. The family members believed that the child was under the influence of some evil spirit

'Orange' alert in Himachal for heavy rain, snow

SHIMLA, 3 MARCH

An 'orange' warning has been issued for heavy snow at isolated locations in Himachal Pradesh's Lahaul and Spiti district on Monday. In response, local police have advised residents and visitors to avoid sensitive areas and unnecessary travel.

The meteorological office has highlighted an 'orange' alert for heavy snowfall in Lahaul and Spiti, while Chamba and Kangra districts face heavy rain, thunderstorms, and lightning. Hail is also expected in Bilaspur, Hamirpur and Solan districts. The Mandi administration has further urged the public to avoid travelling to higher elevations. Hundreds of roads in the state remain closed due to recent landslides and flash floods. *—PTI*

Kerala ragging case: Five students face dismissal

The five accused students are already under suspension **PHOTO:VIDEOGRAB**

T'PURAM, 3 MARCH

Kerala Health Minister Veena George announced that five students involved in the brutal ragging incident at the Government College of Nursing, Kottayam, will be dismissed from the institution.

"The five accused students are already under suspension, and orders have been issued to dismiss them from the college. A formal government order in this regard will be issued soon," she said.

During the Question Hour in the Assembly, George termed the incident as one that had "shocked the conscience of Kerala society."

The minister also acknowledged serious lapses on the part of the college administration.

"As a result, the College Principal and the Assistant Warden in charge have been placed under suspension," she added.

George assured the House that the government would take stringent action to prevent such incidents in the future and ensure strict enforcement of the University Grants Com-mission (UGC) guidelines on ragging in all colleges under the Kerala University of Health Sciences (KUHS), including the effective functioning of anti-ragging cells.

The brutal ragging incident last month had triggered widespread public outcry in the state.

The abuse took place in the boys' hostel, targeting first-year nursing students. Five third-year students were arrested in the case.

Principal Sulekha AT, and assistant professor/assistant warden-in-charge of the student's hostel Ajeesh P Mani of the college, were suspended pending enquiry for allegedly failing to check ragging and effectively intervene in the matter. *—PTI*

THE SOUND OF SILENCE

Performance of World Hearing Day in Geneva. The event aims to raise awareness on how to prevent deafness and hearing loss and promote ear and hearing care
PHOTO: PTI

Bangladesh students form party to shake up politics

Students who played a major role in ousting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government last year have announced the formation of a new political faction which aims to shake up the political landscape in Bangladesh.

The National Citizen Party (NCP) will be headed by Nahid Islam, one of the best-known protest leaders.

Until recently, he served as an adviser to the interim government — led by the Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus — that took charge after Hasina's exit.

Addressing a public rally in the capital Dhaka on Friday, Islam said, "We believe the July 2024 uprising initiated the fight towards a second republic. By writing a new democratic constitution, we must eliminate any possibility of future constitutional autocracy."

Bangladesh has been grappling with political infighting since Hasina fled following weeks of mass, anti-government protests during which over 1,000 people were killed. Hasina currently remains in self-imposed exile in India.

Students, who helped lead the protest in 2024 in Bangladesh have launched a new party - The National Citizen Party. While it is a welcome addition, the ideology and demands of the party are questionable ***PHOTO: PTI***

Since gaining independence from Pakistan in 1971, two parties — Hasina's Awami League (AL) and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of her rival Khaleda Zia — have dominated Bangladeshi politics, while smaller leftist and Islamic parties have struggled to gain significant support.

Many Bangladeshis hope the new, youth-led party will now reshape the political landscape.

"The emergence of a third or fourth force could provide much-needed relief for the electorate," Masud Kamal, a Dhaka-based political analyst told DW. However, he is uncertain whether the NCP will achieve electoral success.

Politics in Bangladesh are notoriously fractious. NCP representative Akhtar Hossain has said his party emphasizes "participatory politics" and rejects both Islamophobia and religious extremism in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

"In Bangladesh, we've seen Islamophobia on one side and extremism on the other," he said. "We don't want this kind of politics in our party. We're advocating for participatory politics, where civic dignity is the primary concern."

Political analyst Kamal said the NCP still lacks a clear ideology, which he described as a "weakness."

"I don't understand the new party's policy or its ideology," he told DW. "They talk about participatory politics, but almost all the party leaders are students from Dhaka University. Yet, the mass uprising included workers, farmers, rickshaw pullers, and even housewives."

He also cast doubt on the new party's popularity, saying, "Calculating a voter base based on social media popularity is a foolish approach."

"I think if the NCP contests the elections without forming an alliance, it will stand in third or fourth place in terms of seats," he stressed.

With the AL weakened, its traditional rivals from the BNP have emerged as the most powerful party in the country.

And the BNP is also likely to be the NCP's toughest opponent in the next general election, which is expected to take place in late 2025 or early 2026.

Samantha Sharmin from the new NCP party recently criticized the BNP, for being an obstacle to "unity."

"All our efforts to create national unity after the fall of Sheikh Hasina have been thwarted and obstructed," she told DW last week. The BNP however rejected the claims.

BNP politician Harunur Rashid welcomed the formation of the NCP but doesn't see it as posing a challenge for his party. "BNP has proven itself to the people. The NCP needs to wait a long time to gain the momentum to compete with us."

The NCP demanded that the interim government ban the AL, a move that has not been supported by the BNP. The more established party maintained that elections must decide the AL's fate.

Sharmin slammed the BNP's stance, saying that it's tantamount to "playing with the people's emotions" and "betraying the spirit of the 2024 uprising."

Kamal warned that excluding the AL from elections could actually lead to a disaster for the NCP, as the AL's share of the vote — somewhere between 30 per cent and 35 per cent might shift to the BNP, potentially making it the largest party in Bangladeshi history. *—DW News*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR ساڈا

Microsoft is making users pay for AI inference cost

After a year of shoehorning generative AI into its flagship products, Microsoft is trying to recoup the costs by raising prices, putting ads in products, and cancelling data centre leases.

Is the tide finally turning on investments into generative AI? The situation is not quite so simple. Tech companies are fully committed to the new technology – but are struggling to find ways to make people pay for it.

Last week, Microsoft unceremoniously pulled back on some planned data centre leases.

The tech giant's CEO, Satya Nadella, also recently suggested AI has so far not produced much value.

Microsoft's actions may seem odd in the current wave of AI hype, coming amid splashy announcements such as OpenAI's USD 500 billion Stargate data centre project.

But if we look closely, nothing in Microsoft's decisions indicates a retreat from AI itself. Rather, we are seeing a change in strategy to make AI profitable by shifting the cost in non-obvious ways onto consumers.

Generative AI is expensive. OpenAI, the market leader with a claimed 400 million active monthly users, is burning money.

Last year, OpenAI brought in USD 3.7 billion in revenue – but spent almost USD 9 billion, for a net loss of around USD 5 billion. Microsoft is OpenAI's biggest investor and provides the company with cloud computing services, so the spending costs Microsoft.

What makes generative AI so expensive? Human labour aside, two costs are associated with AI models: training (building the model) and inference (using the model). While training is an up-front expense, the costs of inference grow with the user base. The bigger the model, the more it costs to run.

A single query on OpenAI's most advanced models can cost up to USD 1,000 in power alone.

In January, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman said even the company's USD 200 per month subscription is not profitable. This signals the company is not only losing money through use of its free models, but through its subscription models as well.

Both training and inference typically take place in data centres. Costs are high because the chips needed to run them are expensive, but so too are electricity, cooling, and the depreciation of hardware.

To date, much AI progress has been achieved by using more of everything. However, there are now plenty of signs this scale-at-all-costs approach might not even be necessary.

Chinese company DeepSeek made waves earlier this year when it revealed it built models comparable to OpenAI's flagship products for a tiny fraction of the training cost. Likewise, researchers from Seattle's Allen Institute for AI (Ai2) and Stanford University claim to have trained a model for as little as USD 50.

In short, AI systems developed and delivered by tech giants might not be profitable. The costs of building and running data centres are a big reason why.

Having sunk billions into generative AI, Microsoft is trying to find the business model that will make the technology profitable.

Microsoft is likely shifting more of the work on users' own devices – where the user pays for the hardware and its running costs. This strategy can be seen on a small button Microsoft began putting on the QWERTY keyboard where it dedicated a key to Copilot AI.

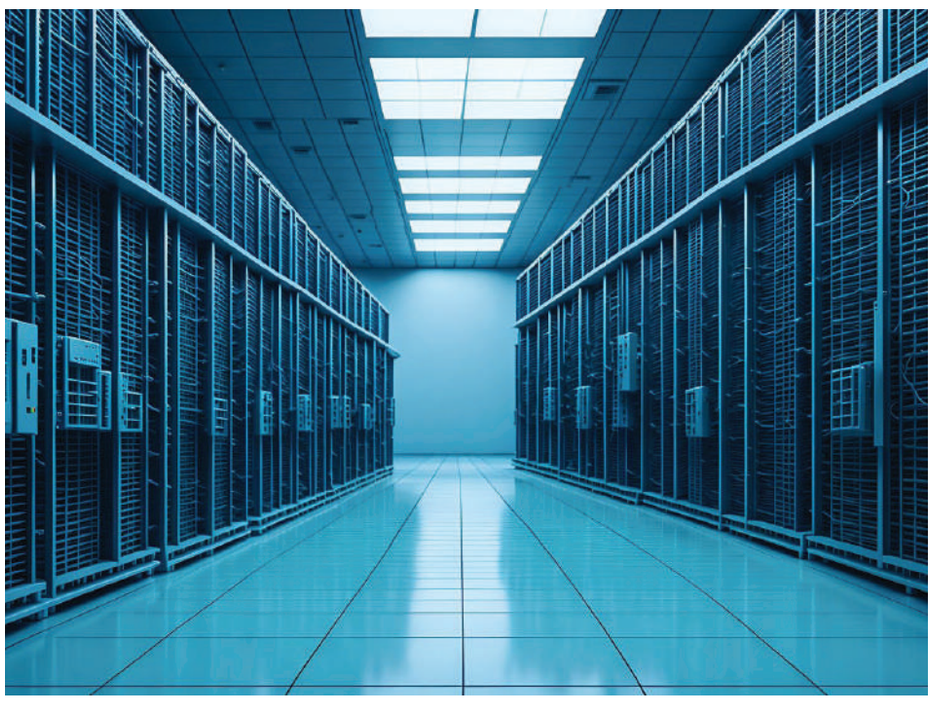
Apple is pursuing a similar strategy. The iPhone manufacturer is not offering most of its AI services in the cloud. Instead, only new devices offer AI capabilities, with on-device processing marketed as a privacy feature that prevents your data travelling elsewhere.

There are benefits to the push to do the work of generative AI inference on the computing devices in our pockets, on our desks, or even on smart watches on our wrists.

It can reduce the energy, resources and waste of data centres, lowering generative AI's carbon, heat and water footprint. It could also reduce bandwidth demands and increase user privacy.

But there are downsides too. It shifts computation costs to consumers, driving demand for new devices. This could intensify with newer, bigger generative AI models. Additionally, distributed e-waste makes recycling much harder. What's more, the playing field won't be level if a device dictates how good your AI can be.

As AI infrastructure costs rise, shifting the costs to consumers becomes an appealing strategy for companies. While big enterprises may manage these costs, individual consumers may struggle. *—PTI*



Open AI, funded largely by Microsoft, reported a net loss of USD 5 billion last year ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Saudi's rise as a mediator signals a decline of Europe's centrality

Saudi Arabia's emergence as a key global negotiator has significantly advanced its geopolitical stature.

US President Donald Trump's preference for Saudi Arabia over traditional European venues like Geneva, Oslo, Paris, and London for the Ukraine peace talks serves both symbolic and strategic purposes.

It signals a shift away from Europe's centrality in diplomacy and fits well with Trump's broader policy of bilateral, pragmatic diplomacy that prioritises economic and geopolitical gains.

Trump's choice of Riyadh for the Ukraine peace talks also shows that Saudi Arabia has strategically positioned itself as a neutral intermediary, leveraging its strong relations with global powers, including the US, Russia, China, and European nations.

Historically, Saudi Arabia has acted as a diplomatic mediator in significant regional conflicts. It played a crucial role in the Taif Agreement (1989), which helped end Lebanon's civil war, and has actively mediated disputes within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the broader Middle Eastern region. These past experiences add to its credibility as a peace mediator.

The Jeddah peace summit in August 2023 demonstrated its ambition to actively mediate rather than merely host.

Attended by representatives from over 40 countries, the summit aimed to reinforce Ukraine's territorial integrity and secure broader international support for Kyiv's peace conditions, despite not yielding immediate tangible outcomes.

Riyadh's successful facilitation of critical prisoner exchanges between Russia, Ukraine, and the US further illustrates its growing diplomatic capacity and influence.

For a brief period, the US-Saudi partnership weakened as US reliance on Saudi oil declined and Riyadh questioned American security commitments.

Under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), Saudi Arabia maintained ties with the US while deepening relations with China and Russia, notably ignoring US requests to boost oil production following the Ukraine invasion and collaborating with Moscow through OPEC+.

The 2023–24 Israel-Hamas war complicated Saudi-Israeli normalisation efforts, though Riyadh remained open to the deal. Saudi Arabia also positioned itself as a neutral mediator in Ukraine while strengthening economic and technological ties with China.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Saudi Arabia's ruler Mohammed bin Salman. Saudi Arabia's increased role as a neutral mediator is a shift from using traditional European venues ***PHOTO: X***

Meanwhile, Washington sought to curb Saudi-China cooperation by offering enhanced security guarantees, including nuclear energy and defence commitments. However, Riyadh continued to hedge, maintaining US security ties while expanding its global influence. This delicate balance has persisted amid shifting geopolitical interests.

President Trump's affinity for Saudi Arabia dates back to his first presidency when his inaugural foreign visit was to Riyadh, marking a reset in US-Saudi relations after the strained Obama-era ties.

Trump's personal and business connections with Saudi Arabia—bolstered by substantial Saudi investments in his enterprises, including a reported USD 600 billion pledge—further cemented Riyadh as his preferred diplomatic hub.

Russian President Vladimir Putin explicitly recognised Riyadh as a good partner, and a comfortable and credible mediator, citing strong relationships with Saudi Arabia.

The European Union, traditionally central in diplomatic negotiations, is experiencing reduced influence in global matters, reflecting broader scepticism about Europe's geopolitical relevance. China's active participation in Saudi-hosted negotiations also demonstrates Riyadh's adept balancing act among global powers, challenging Moscow's narrative of a cohesive Sino-Russian alliance.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia had to clarify that it would not normalise ties with Israel without an independent Palestinian state, rejecting Trump's claim that Riyadh had dropped this demand.

The role of MBS has been significant in advancing Saudi Arabia's diplomatic image. His personal and business networks have cultivated close relationships with key leaders like Trump and Putin, placing Riyadh at the centre of major global dialogues, expressively enhancing its international prestige and soft power.

MBS's extensive economic engagements—including substantial investments in the US, partnerships with China on infrastructure and technology and close coordination with Russia on oil production — bolster Saudi Arabia's diplomatic relevance, aligning with his 'Vision 2030' plan to diversify the economy beyond oil.

Other GCC countries, such as the UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait actively support Saudi Arabia's diplomatic initiatives. This collective endorsement bolsters Saudi Arabia's credibility and regional leadership.

The outcome of the US-Russia peace talks in Riyadh is expected to lay the groundwork for ending the Ukraine conflict.

Initial agreements from the talks include restoring diplomatic staffing at embassies, forming a team dedicated to supporting peace negotiations, and exploring increased economic cooperation.

Although Kyiv expressed concerns about being initially excluded, the eventual involvement of Ukraine remains critical for long-term peace sustainability.

Trump's pragmatic approach, leveraging Saudi Arabia's mediation capabilities, could potentially help address the war's pressing humanitarian and economic issues, marking a notable foreign policy success distinct from previous administrations. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Afghan, Pakistani forces trade fire at border crossing

PESHAWAR, 3 MARCH

Pakistani and Afghan forces traded fire overnight at a key northwestern border crossing that has been closed for more than a week over a dispute between the two neighbours, officials said on Monday. No casualties were reported on either side of the Torkham crossing, which has been shut for 11 days due to Pakistan disputing Afghanistan's construction of a new border post there. Both countries have in the past closed Torkham and the southwestern Chaman border crossing, most often over deadly shootings and crossfire. The crossings are vital for trade and travel between Pakistan and landlocked Afghanistan. A Pakistani official said security forces opened fire unprovoked in the early hours of Monday. Pakistani personnel returned fire, the official said. *—PTI*

Pope Francis taken off mechanical ventilation

ROME, 3 MARCH

Pope Francis remained in stable condition and did not need any mechanical ventilation Sunday, the Vatican said. It was a sign that he had overcome the possible complications from a respiratory crisis on Friday and that his breathing function overall was improving as he recovers from double pneumonia. The 88-year-old pope did continue to receive high flow supplemental oxygen after Friday's coughing episode, which sparked fears of a new lung infection. Doctors in their late Sunday update said Francis remained stable but again referred to the complexity of his overall condition. Francis rested was had a visit in the morning by the Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, and his chief of staff, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra. *—PTI*

IMF mission begins review of Pakistan's $7B loan

ISLAMABAD, 3 MARCH

As a nine-member International Monetary Fund (IMF) mission begins its first biannual review of Pakistan's USD 7B Extended Fund Facility, the government remains optimistic about a successful conclusion to the talks, which would unlock a USD 1.1B tranche over the following three weeks, a media report said on Monday. The IMF delegation led by Nathan Porter will hold discussions with Pakistani authorities from 3 to 14 March, assessing the country's compliance with quantitative performance criteria, structural benchmarks and indicative targets under the 37-month programme, Dawn News reported. A government official said there were technical slippages for certain deadlines, but they had been overcome with some delays – within weeks. *—PTI*

The ceasefire's first phase saw a surge in humanitarian aid to Gaza after months of growing hunger **PHOTO: X**

Israel draws flak for blocking aid to Gaza

Move to pressurise Hamas to accept new ceasefire deal

TEL AVIV, 3 MARCH

Israel faced sharp criticism as it stopped the entry of all food and other supplies into Gaza on Sunday and warned of "additional consequences" for Hamas if a fragile ceasefire is not extended. Mediators Egypt and Qatar accused Israel of violating humanitarian law by using starvation as a weapon.

The ceasefire's first phase saw a surge in humanitarian aid after months of growing hunger. Hamas accused Israel of trying to derail the next phase on Sunday, hours after its first phase had ended and called Israel's decision to cut off aid "a war crime and a blatant attack" on a truce that took a year of negotiations before taking hold in January.

In the second phase, Hamas would release dozens of remaining hostages in return for an Israeli pullout from Gaza and a lasting ceasefire. Negotiations on the second phase were meant to start a month ago but haven't begun.

Israel said on Sunday that a new US proposal calls for extending the ceasefire through Ramadan – the Muslim holy month that began over the weekend – and the Jewish Passover holiday, which ends 20 April.

Under that proposal, Hamas would release half the hostages on the first day and the rest when an agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said. The militants currently hold 59 hostages, 35 of them believed to be dead.

UN humanitarian chief Tom Fletcher called Israel's decision "alarming", noting that international humanitarian law makes clear that aid access must be allowed.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres urged all parties to make every effort to prevent a return to hostilities in Gaza, and called for humanitarian aid to flow back into Gaza immediately and for the release of all hostages, said spokesman Stéphane Dujarric.

Five non-governmental groups asked Israel's Supreme Court for an order barring the state from preventing aid from entering Gaza, claiming the move violates Israel's obligations under international law: "These obligations cannot be condition on political considerations." *—PTI*

Zelenskyy thanks US after Trump's 'not grateful' charge

KYIV, 3 MARCH

Zelenskyy's "Gratitude" Video Message After Trump's "Not Thankful" Charge **PHOTO: X**

Days after the White House showdown with US President Donald Trump over not being "thankful" for the United States' support in the war against Russia, Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Monday said he "understands the importance of America" and is "grateful" for all the assistance.

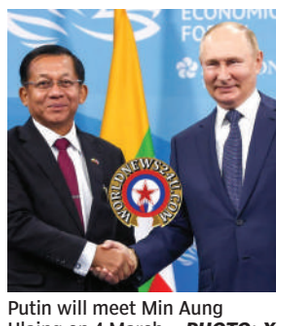
"Of course, we understand the importance of America, and we are grateful for all the support we've received from the United States. There has not been a day when we haven't felt gratitude. It's gratitude for the preservation of our independence – our resilience in Ukraine is based on what our partners are doing for us – and for their own security," he said after attending a key summit on the Russia-Ukraine war in London.

"Everyone is united on the main issue – for peace to be real, we need real security guarantees. And this is the position of all of Europe – the entire continent, the United Kingdom, the European Union, and Turkey," he added.

The security summit was hosted by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. France's Emmanuel Macron, Canada's Justin Trudeau, and Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni were among the 18 leaders who attended the meeting on the war, which broke out when Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. *—Agencies*

MYANMAR LEADER VISITS RUSSIA; TO HOLD TALKS WITH PUTIN

BANGKOK, 3 MARCH



Putin will meet Min Aung Hlaing on 4 March **PHOTO: X**

The head of Myanmar's military government travelled to Russia on Monday on an official visit to a major ally of the Southeast Asian nation that has been shunned by much of the West for overthrowing a democratically elected government and subsequent brutal repression.

Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, capital Naypyitaw, will meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin. He is accompanied by fellow members of the ruling military council and Cabinet, as well as military officials, MRTV reported.

The report said Hlaing will also meet with other top Russian officials and discuss bilateral ties, economic affairs and security with the aim to strengthen strategic cooperation.

Russia, along with China, is a major supporter and arms supplier of Myanmar's military government. Russian-made fighter jets are used in attacks on territory under the control of ethnic minority groups, many of which are allies with pro-democracy resistance forces. *—PTI*

Importers rush to beat US tariffs

BANGKOK, 3 MARCH

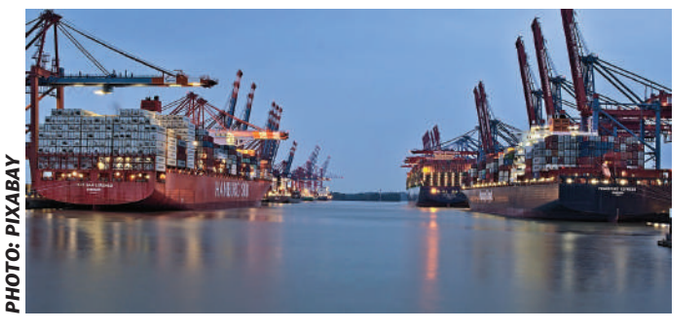


PHOTO: PIXABAY

Chinese manufacturers reported an uptick in orders in February as importers rushed to beat higher US tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, as a Chinese state media report said that Beijing was considering ways to retaliate.

Trump earlier imposed a tariff of 10 per cent on imports from China and that will rise to 20 per cent beginning on Tuesday.

He also ended the "de minimis" loophole that exempted imports worth less than USD 800 from tariffs, in a blow to companies whose online sales direct to consumers had soared in recent years.

The Global Times, a newspaper of China's ruling Communist Party, said on Monday that Beijing was studying both tariffs and non-tariff moves to counter Trump's higher tariffs.

Asked about that report, Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian said that "China will take all necessary measures to firmly safeguard own legitimate rights and interests".

"US agricultural and food products will most likely be listed," it said. *—PTI*

Iranian official quits under hard-liner pressure

TEHRAN, 3 MARCH

A former Iranian foreign minister who was key to the country's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers reportedly tendered his resignation on Monday from the government of reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian, caving in to pressure from hard-liners.

The resignation of Mohammad Javad Zarif signalled Tehran's rapid retreat from its outreach to the West.

Zarif has served as vice president to Pezeshkian and has long been a target of hard-liners within the country's theocracy. *—PTI*

Vaccine skeptic RFK Jr backs measles jab

WASHINGTON DC, 3 MARCH

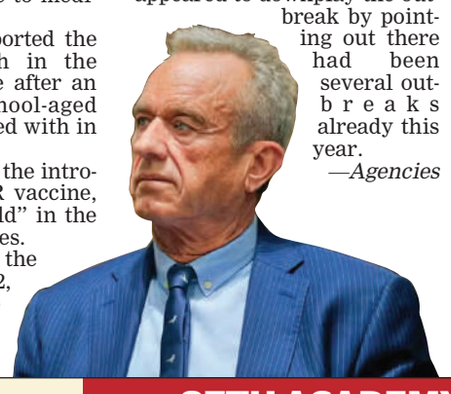
Robert F Kennedy Jr, the top health official in the United States who is known for his skepticism of vaccines, has backed the measles jab amid a deadly outbreak of the infectious disease in Texas.

In an opinion piece published by Fox News on Sunday, Kennedy said, "Vaccines not only protect individual children from measles, but also contribute to community immunity, protecting those who are unable to be vaccinated due to medical reasons."

US last month reported the first measles death in the country in a decade after an unvaccinated school-aged child was hospitalised with in Texas.

He said that before the introduction of the MMR vaccine, "virtually every child" in the US contracted measles.

"For example, in the US, from 1953 to 1962, on average there were 530,217 confirmed cases and 440 deaths, a case fatality rate of 1 in 1,205 cases," he wrote. As of Friday, 146 cases had been identified in the state since late January, according to the Texas Department of State Health Services. Health officials have said the cases have been concentrated in a community of Mennonites, a Christian sect that arose out of the radical factions of the 16th-century Reformation. Kennedy, who has promoted scientifically discredited research linking vaccines to autism, attracted criticism last month when he appeared to downplay the outbreak by pointing out there had been several outbreaks already this year. *—Agencies*



Japan to stay off UN meet on nukes ban

TOKYO, 3 MARCH

Japan will not attend a UN conference on the treaty banning nuclear weapons, a top government official in Tokyo said on Monday, noting that US nuclear deterrence is crucial to the country's security and its participation would send the "wrong message".

Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said Japan's national security is the primary reason it will not participate at the conference, which starts on Monday in New York. "Under the severe security environment, nuclear deterrence is indispensable to defend the people's lives and assets, as well as Japan's sovereignty and peace," Hayashi said. Japan's participation as an observer would "send a wrong message about the Japanese policy (supporting) nuclear deterrence and interfere with our effort in security, peace and safety". UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons was approved in 2017 and went into force in 2021 following a decades-long campaign aimed at preventing a repeat of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. *—PTI*

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi **PHOTO: X**

Japan deploys 2,000 firefighters to tackle forest fire

TOKYO, 3 MARCH

More than 2,000 firefighters, backed by military helicopters, are battling Japan's biggest forest fire in three decades, as the blaze burns thousands of hectares of land every day.

Officials on Monday said that about 4,600 residents remain under evacuation advisories as the fire rages in the northern Iwate region, killing at least one-person last week.

The fire, which broke out near Ofunato, follows record low rainfall in the area and last year's hottest summer on record across Japan, as climate change pushes up temperatures worldwide. "Although it is inevitable that the fire will spread to some extent, we will take all possible measures to ensure there will be no impact on people's homes," Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said in parliament.

The fire has consumed 5,200 acres of land since it started on Thursday, said the Fire and Disaster Management Agency (FDMA) on Monday.

"We are still examining the size of the affected area, but it is the biggest since the 1992 wildfire" in Kushiro, FDMA spokesman Hokkaido told the AFP news agency on Saturday.

Firefighters from 14 Japanese regions, including units from Tokyo, were tackling the blaze, with 16 helicopters. *—Agencies*

97TH ACADEMY AWARDS

Anora sweeps Oscars with 5 awards

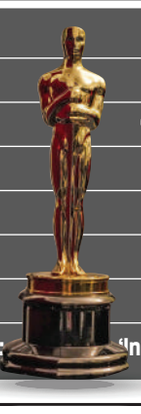
Best Animated Film: 'Flow'

Best Supporting Actor Kieran Culkin, 'A Real Pain'

Best Supporting Actress: Zoe Saldaña, 'Emilia Pérez'

Best Documentary Feature: 'NO OTHER LAND': The documentary is about the life of a Palestinian family who are forcefully displaced from their home in the West Bank by the Israeli government.

Best International Film:	'I'm Still Here'
Best Original Score:	'The Brutalist'
Best Original Song:	'El Mal' from 'Emilia Pérez'
Visual Effects:	'Dune: Part Two'
Best Costume Design:	'Wicked'
Best Cinematography:	'The Brutalist'
Best Sound:	'Dune: Part Two'
Best Animated Short Film:	'In the Shadow of the Cypress'



Gold prices rise by Rs 200, silver advances Rs 100

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

Gold prices rose by Rs 200 to Rs 87,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday amid fresh buying by jewellers and retailers and a weak rupee, according to the All India Sarafa Association. The precious metal of 99.9 per cent purity had closed at Rs 87,700 per 10 grams on Friday. Gold of 99.5 per cent purity advanced by Rs 200 to Rs 87,500 per 10 grams. It had settled at Rs 87,300 per 10 grams in the previous market close. Additionally, silver prices also went up by Rs 100 to Rs 96,500 per kg. In futures trade on the MCX, gold contracts for April delivery jumped Rs 698 to Rs 84,917 per 10 grams. Also, silver futures for May contracts surged by Rs 1,193 to Rs 95,521 per kg. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Rupee settles 3P higher at 87.34 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

The rupee settled with a gain of 3 paise at 87.34 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday amid weakness of the American currency in the overseas market and lower crude oil prices. According to forex traders, investors' upbeat sentiment was restricted due to volatile domestic equity markets and unabated withdrawal of foreign funds. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened at 87.36 and moved in a wide range during the session, touching the intraday high of 87.25 and the low of 87.41 against the greenback. The unit ended the session at 87.34 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous closing level. On Friday, the rupee fell 19 paise to settle at 87.37 against the US dollar. *—PTI*

Prada edges closer to buying Versace for about €1.5B

LONDON, 3 MARCH

Prada is emerging as the frontrunner to acquire Versace from Capri Holdings for approximately €1.5 billion, a move that would unite two of Italy's most iconic luxury fashion houses. Sources familiar with the discussions indicate that negotiations, which have been ongoing for months, are now progressing, with a deal potentially closing within weeks. Capri initially sought €3 billion for Versace, and interest from other buyers extended the talks. However, pricing and timing remain subject to change. Prada co-founder Miuccia Prada acknowledged industry interest in Versace but declined further comment. New York-based Capri acquired Versace in 2018 for €1.85 billion but accelerated plans to sell after scrapping a merger with Tapestry. Prada, Italy's largest luxury group, sees acquisitions as a growth strategy amid industry shifts. *—Agencies*

Coal India sets 788 MT production; rules out price cut

KOLKATA, 3 MARCH

Coal India Limited (CIL) is expecting a production of 788 million tonnes (MT) and an offtake of 765 MT for the current fiscal year ending March 2025, its chairman P M Prasad said on Monday. The initial production target was 838 MT, which was revised to 806-810 MT in January. In FY'24, the company achieved production of 773.65 MT, reflecting a 10 per cent year-on-year growth. Both production and offtake are expected to grow by 1.5 per cent this year, based on current estimates against 10 per cent and 8.5 per cent growth, respectively, last year. Coal India has set a production target of 868 million tonnes for FY'26. *—PTI*

Markets close lower on selling in HDFC Bank, RIL

Sensex declines 112.16 pts to close at 73,085; Nifty at 22,119.30

UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel, NTPC, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were the gainers ***PHOTO: X***

MUMBAI, 3 MARCH

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty closed lower in a volatile trade on Monday due to intense selling pressure in market heavyweights HDFC Bank and Reliance Industries amid unabated foreign fund outflows.

Falling for the second straight session, the 30-share BSE benchmark declined 112.16 points or 0.15 per cent to close at 73,085.94. During the day, it hit a high of 73,649.72 and a low of 72,784.54.

Extending losses for the ninth straight day, the NSE Nifty slipped 5.40 points or 0.02 per cent to settle at 22,119.30. In the session, it slumped 120 points or 0.54 per cent to hit 22,004.70.

- Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 11,639.02 crore on Friday, according to exchange data

From the Sensex pack, Reliance Industries, Bajaj Finserv, HDFC Bank, Adani Ports, Maruti Suzuki India, Axis Bank, Hindustan Unilever, Sun Pharmaceuticals and Asian Paints were among the laggards.

UltraTech Cement, Bharti Airtel, NTPC, Infosys, Bajaj Finance, Mahindra & Mahindra, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were the gainers.

In Asian markets, Tokyo and Hong Kong were ended in green, while Shanghai in red. Seoul stock markets were closed due to a holiday.

European markets were trading in the positive territory in the mid-session deals. The US markets ended positive on Friday.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.58 per cent to USD 72.39 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 11,639.02 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

On Friday, the BSE index tanked 1,414.33 points to settle at 73,198.10. The NSE Nifty slumped 420.35 points to close at 22,124.70. *—PTI*

Smallcap, midcap plunge as selling pressure mounts

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

The broader market faced intense selling pressure on March 3, with midcap and smallcap stocks taking a significant hit as investors rushed to offload their holdings.

The Nifty Smallcap 100 index tumbled 2.4 percent, sliding to its lowest levels, while the Nifty Midcap 100 index also dropped two percent by around 11:30 AM.

Market experts have repeatedly cautioned against stretched valuations in the midcap and smallcap segments, but retail investors largely overlooked these warnings. Analysts now believe that a correction was inevitable as froth built up in these stocks.

S Naren, Chief Investment Officer at ICICI Prudential AMC, recently raised concerns about high valuations in the midcap and smallcap space, sparking industry-wide debate. Meanwhile, Amish Shah, Head of India Research at Bank of America Securities, remains cautious, warning that despite recent corrections, these segments are still overvalued. Kotak Institutional Equities analysts echoed similar sentiments, predicting a varied market performance. *—Agencies*

PMI registered 56.3 in February, down from 57.7 in January, but remained firmly within the 'expansionary' territory ***PHOTO: X***

India's mfg sector growth slips to 14-month low

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

India's manufacturing sector growth fell to a 14-month low in February amid softer increase in new orders and production, a monthly survey said on Monday.

The seasonally adjusted HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) registered 56.3 in February, down from 57.7 in January, but remained firmly within the 'expansionary' territory.

In PMI parlance, a print above 50 means expansion, while a score below 50 denotes contraction.

Although softer than January's near 14-year high, the pace of expansion was sharp, the survey said, adding that new export orders rose strongly in February, as manufacturers continued to capitalise on robust global demand for their goods, the survey said.

Moreover, favourable domestic and international demand prompted firms to increase purchasing activity and hire extra workers.

On the job front, manufacturers continued to expand their workforce numbers in February.

The rate of job creation was the second-best in the series' history, behind only that recorded in January.

According to the survey, February witnessed the slowest rise in cost burdens in a year, but demand buoyancy kept charge inflation at an elevated level.

The HSBC India Manufacturing PMI is compiled by S&P Global from responses to questionnaires sent to purchasing managers in a panel of around 400 manufacturers.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, the Indian economy grew by 6.2 per cent in the December quarter, recovering sequentially from seven-quarter lows, but the expansion came in lower than last year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Paytm shares plunge 4% after ED notice

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Shares of Paytm owner One97 Communications on Monday plunged more than 4 per cent after the Enforcement Directorate (ED) sent a notice to the fintech firm for alleged violation of certain FEMA rules by the company and its two subsidiaries with respect to certain investment transactions.

The stock of the company dived 4.39 per cent to Rs 683.55 apiece on the National Stock Exchange (NSE).

On the BSE, it went down by 4.37 per cent to Rs 685 per piece.

The market was trading in the negative zone with the 30-share BSE Sensex benchmark slipped 271.22 points or 0.37 per cent to 72,926.88 in the late morning trade. Also, the NSE Nifty dipped 93.60 points or 0.42 per cent to 22,031.10.

In a regulatory filing on Saturday, Paytm said that it received a notice from the Enforcement Directorate (ED) for alleged violation of certain FEMA rules by the company and its two subsidiaries -- Little Internet and Nearbuy -- with respect to certain investment transactions.

Later, Paytm clarified that the alleged breach pertains to the period when the two companies were not its subsidiaries.

One97 Communications (OCL) said that it has received a FEMA (Foreign Exchange Management Act) rules violation notice from the ED on February 28, which does not specify financial impact but alleges contraventions in respect of aggregate amount of over Rs 611 crore.

According to the break-up shared by the company, OCL transactions amounting to over Rs 245 crore, LIPL's about Rs 345 crore and NIPL's about Rs 21 crore have been listed in the alleged breach. *—PTI*

Flour millers seek Wheat Board, policy for growth

GOA, 3 MARCH

The flour millers' apex body RFMFI on Monday demanded the government to set up a Wheat Board to provide policy guidance and market expansion opportunities, besides promoting research activities.

Addressing a conference here, Rollers Flour Millers' Federation of India (RFMFI) President Navneet Chitlangia said, "Our industry is more than just an economic sector, it is the backbone of the food supply chain, a key contributor to employment and an essential force in ensuring the nation's food security."

To unlock the potential of this industry, he said there should be a stable and predictable wheat policy to prevent market volatility.

The Federation president also urged the government to review the import duty on wheat after the procurement season, which will end in June. *—PTI*

INFLOWS AT $11.55B

PHOTO: X

FDI drops 5.6% to $10.9B in Oct-Dec

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Foreign direct investment in India dipped by 5.6 per cent year-on-year to USD 10.9 billion in October-December quarter of this fiscal due to global economic uncertainties, according to the government data.

FDI inflows during October-December 2023-24 stood at USD 11.55 billion.

According to the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) data, in the July-September quarter of the current fiscal, the inflows were up by about 43 per cent year-on-year to USD 13.6 billion and had increased 47.8 per cent annually to USD 16.17 billion in the preceding April-June quarter.

Total FDI, which includes equity inflows, reinvested earnings and other capital, grew by 21.3 per cent to USD 62.48 billion during the first nine months of this fiscal from USD 51.5 billion in April-December 2023-24. *—PTI*

Cement demand to cross 640 MTPA: UltraTech

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Cement demand is expected to cross 640 million tonnes per annum by FY30, said leading player and Aditya Birla group flagship firm UltraTech Cement in an investor presentation.

It expects the cement demand to have a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7 to 8 per cent between FY24 and FY30, citing industry estimates and research reports.

The cement demand was at 424 MTPA in the financial year which ended on March 31, 2024, according to the investor presentation, a copy of which was submitted to exchanges last week.

The "cement demand expected to cross 640 MTPA by FY30," said UltraTech Cement Ltd.

The company is expanding its grey cement production capacity and has projected to have 209.3 MTPA output by FY27. *—PTI*

Coffee Day stock up 20% as NCLAT halts case

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Shares of Coffee Day Enterprises, which owns the Cafe Coffee Day chain, on Monday jumped 20 per cent to hit its upper circuit limit after the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) set aside the insolvency proceedings against the company.

The stock of Coffee Day Enterprises Ltd (CDEL) zoomed 19.97 per cent each to Rs 25.65 and Rs 25.53 apiece -- also its 52-week high -- on the BSE and National Stock Exchange (NSE), respectively.

In the past four consecutive sessions, the stock has been locked at five per cent lower circuit.

The market is trading in the negative territory with the BSE Sensex declining 360.20 points or 0.49 per cent to 72,837.90, while NSE Nifty slipped 103.05 points or 0.47 per cent to 22,021.65.

On Thursday, the NCLAT had set aside the insolvency proceedings against CDEL.

Coffee Day Enterprises is in trouble after the death of founder Chairman V G Siddhartha in July 2019. It is paring its debts through asset resolutions and has significantly scaled down from the time the trouble started. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

2ND JOB CUT IN 5 MONTHS

Ola Electric to lay off 1K employees amid losses

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Ola Electric Mobility Ltd. is cutting over 1,000 jobs, including contract workers, as the company struggles to curb mounting losses, sources familiar with the matter revealed. The layoffs span multiple departments, including procurement, fulfillment, customer relations, and charging infrastructure.

This marks Ola's second round of job cuts in under five months, following the termination of around 500 employees in November. The latest layoffs account for over a quarter of Ola's 4,000-employee workforce as of March 2024, though contract workers are not included in public disclosures.

The Bhavish Aggarwal-led company, which went public in August last year, has been grappling with financial and regulatory challenges. In the December quarter, Ola's losses surged by 50 per cent, and the company has faced scrutiny from India's market regulator and consumer protection authorities.

- This marks Ola's second round of job cuts in under five months, following the termination of around 500 employees in November

As part of its restructuring efforts, Ola is automating parts of its customer relations operations. The company's spokesperson, in an emailed response to Bloomberg, stated: "We have restructured and automated our front-end operations, delivering improved margins, reduced costs, and enhanced customer experience while eliminating redundant roles for better productivity." However, the statement did not specify the number of workers affected.

Bhavish Aggarwal ***PHOTO: PTI***

Ola Electric's troubles extend beyond workforce reductions. The company's stock has plunged over 60 per cent from its peak following its blockbuster IPO. It has also been losing market share, ceding its once-dominant position in the electric two-wheeler segment to rivals.

Amid these challenges, Ola Electric launched a record 3,200 outlets in December in an effort to expand its footprint and address widespread service complaints. However, local reports indicate the company was dealing with as many as 80,000 customer grievances per month, reflecting dissatisfaction with its after-sales support.

As Ola continues its cost-cutting measures and operational overhaul, analysts remain cautious about its ability to reclaim lost ground in electric vehicle market. *—Agencies*

OLA ELECTRIC STOCK DECLINES OVER 5%, HITS 52-WEEK LOW

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Shares of Ola Electric Mobility on Monday declined more than 5 per cent in the mid session trade amid reports that the company is laying off over a thousand employees to pare its mounting losses. The stock of Ola Electric Mobility plunged 5.5 per cent each to hit a 52-week low of Rs 53.71 per share on both BSE and NSE. After making a stellar debut on the stock exchanges in August last year, Ola Electric's shares have tanked 66 per cent from the peak of Rs 157.53 and Rs 157.40 apiece on the BSE and NSE, respectively. The company said it achieved the sales milestone on the back of S1 portfolio and sales-and-service network of 4,000 stores across the country. *—PTI*

FIFA lifts ban on PFF after constitutional changes

LAHORE, 3 MARCH

FIFA, the world governing body of football, has lifted the suspension on the Pakistan Football Federation (PFF) after the necessary constitutional changes were made to ensure smooth governance of the sport in the country. FIFA had imposed the suspension on the PFF on 5 February due to the failure of Congress members to amend the constitution as required by the global body. However, last Thursday, PFF Congress members reached a consensus to implement the necessary amendments. A PFF official confirmed that FIFA informed them on Sunday that the suspension had been lifted. With the suspension lifted, Pakistan will now be able to participate in the 2027 AFC Asian Cup qualifiers, with the national team scheduled to face Syria in their Group 'E' opener on 25 March. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

Khelo India Winter Games to begin from 9 March

SRINAGAR, 3 MARCH

The Khelo India Winter Games (KIWG) 2025 will be held at Gulmarg from 9 to 12 March following heavy snowfall over the past few days in the higher reaches of the valley. The Winter Games, which were earlier scheduled to be held from 22 to 25 February, had to be postponed due to lack of snow at Gulmarg with Kashmir witnessing one of its driest winters in recent history. This is the second leg of the Winter games where competitions will be held in skiing and snowboarding. The first leg of the games were held in Leh district of Ladakh in January this year where athletes competed in ice-skating and ice-hockey events. *—PTI*

Serie A: Milan crisis deepens after 3rd loss to Lazio

MILAN, 3 MARCH

AC Milan fell further into crisis as a stoppage-time penalty condemned it to a 2–1 defeat at home to Lazio in the Italian league. Despite being reduced to 10 men, Milan managed to level in the 84th minute on Sunday but Pedro converted a penalty in the eighth minute of stoppages. This was Milan's third straight Serie A loss amid a disastrous run that also saw the Rossoneri crash out of the Champions League. Milan dropped to ninth in the standings and was leapfrogged by Roma after Claudio Ranieri's team fought back to beat 10-man Como 2–1. Lazio climbed back into fourth place – a point above Juventus, which hosts Hellas Verona on Monday. Sixth-placed Bologna rallied to beat relegation-threatened Cagliari 2–1. *—PTI*

Pant nominated for Laureus Comeback of the Year Award

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Indian cricket team's swashbuckling batter-keeper, who returned to action after surviving a horrific car accident in December 2022, has been nominated for the prestigious Laureus World Sports Award 2025 in the comeback of the year category. The awards ceremony will take place in Madrid on 21 April. Pant suffered the near-fatal car accident on 30 December, 2022 while driving from Delhi to his hometown Roorkee. The 27-year-old made a remarkable recovery and returned to action for his then IPL franchise Delhi Capitals against Punjab Kings last year in Mullanpur. Pant then made a triumphant return to Test cricket, scoring a century against Bangladesh in his first game in the format since his car accident. His performance helped India secure a 280-run victory. *—PTI*

CT: India look to spin new tale against Aus

New Zealand will lean on tri-series experience to beat South Africa in semifinals

DUBAI, 3 MARCH

History weighs heavily against them but India would rely on a potent spin battery and familiarity with the conditions to break the knockout jinx against an undermanned Australia when the two formidable cricket forces clash in the Champions Trophy semifinal here on Tuesday.

It will not be a straightforward task, though, as the Aussies are a resilient beast in global tournaments even without their lead cast of Pat Cummins, Josh Hazlewood and Mitchell Starc.

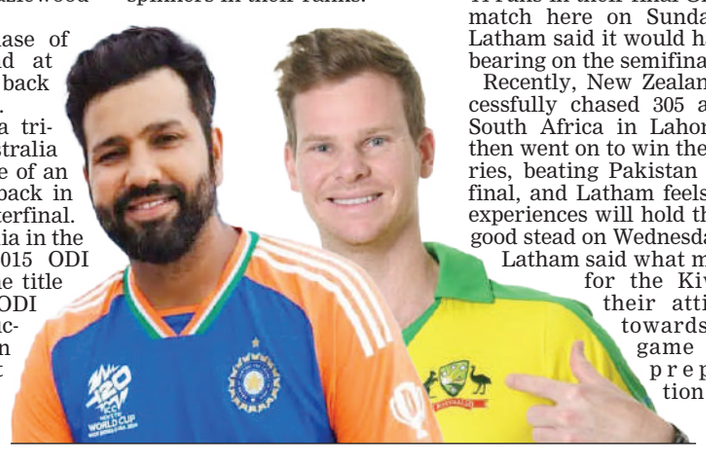
- It will not be a straightforward task, though, as the Aussies are a resilient beast in global tournaments even without their lead cast of Cummins, Josh & Starc

Their stunning chase of 352 against England at Lahore a few days back validates the thought.

The last time India triumphed against Australia in the knockout stage of an ICC event was way back in 2011 World Cup quarterfinal.

India lost to Australia in the semifinals of the 2015 ODI World Cup and in the title clash of the 2023 ODI World Cup before succumbing to them in the World Test Championship final in 2023.

This Indian side will realistically hope to rewrite that largely melancholic script over the last 14 years and the primary reason for that optimism is the presence of some top of the line spinners in their ranks.



The easiest explanation of their dominance is the knowledge of the conditions having had the luxury of playing all their matches in Dubai.

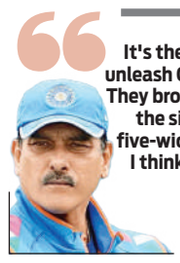
NZ will 'lean; on tri-series experience to beat SA in semifinal

Senior batter Tom Latham said New Zealand will take confidence from their recent win over South Africa in the tri-series when they face the same opponents in the semifinal of the Champions Trophy in Lahore on Wednesday.

New Zealand lost to India by 44 runs in their final Group A match here on Sunday but Latham said it would have no bearing on the semifinal.

Recently, New Zealand successfully chased 305 against South Africa in Lahore and then went on to win the tri-series, beating Pakistan in the final, and Latham feels those experiences will hold them in good stead on Wednesday.

Latham said what matters for the Kiwis is their atti tude towards the game and preparation. *—PTI*



"It's the right time to unleash Chakravarthy. They brought him into the side; he's got a five-wicket haul, and I think he's there to stay

-Ravi Shastri, former player

"India's familiarity with conditions helped as spin quartet put us under pressure

-Matt Henry, New Zealand pacer

"I was nervous and emotional ahead of first spell, but chat with seniors calmed me down

-Varun Chakravarthy, India's spinner

THIS IS NOT OUR HOME, PITCH HAS GIVEN US CHALLENGES: ROHIT

DUBAI, 3 MARCH

Skipper Rohit Sharma struck down the notion of India having an unfair advantage in the Champions Trophy due to playing all their matches in Dubai, saying it is not their "home venue" and the pitches here have thrown up "different challenges" to his side.

Several former players from Pakistan, Australia and England have taken an exception to India staying in Dubai for the entire duration of the ICC showpiece, saying the move allowed them better chance to acclimatise to the conditions than other teams in Group A.

"Every time, the pitch is giving you different challenges. The three matches that we played here, the pitch has behaved differently. This is not our home, this is Dubai. We don't play so many matches here, and this is new for us too," Rohit said during the pre-match press meet ahead of the semifinal against Australia.

- Several former players from Pakistan, Australia and England have taken an exception to India staying in Dubai for the entire duration of the ICC showpiece

Rohit said his side needs to adapt to the surface quickly during the last-four match against the Aussies.

Rohit cited India's last Group A match against New Zealand here on Sunday to emphasise his point.

Rohit also warned of some intense competition in the semifinal to be played here on Tuesday. *—PTI*

PRAGUE MASTERS

Praggnanandhaa draws with Aravindh

PRAGUE, 3 MARCH

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa played out a draw with fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram as the two stayed a full point ahead of nearest challengers after the fifth round of Prague Masters chess tournament here.

With 3.5 points in their kitty, Aravindh and Praggnanandhaa are now followed by top seed Wei Yi of China, Anish Giri of Holland, Quang Leim Le of Vietnam and Vincent Keymer of Germany, who all have 2.5 points apiece.

Sharing the sixth spot are the remaining four contestants, Czech duo of David Navara and Nguyen Thai Dai Van, Sam Shankland of United States and Gurel Ediz of Turkey.

There are four more rounds remaining in the 10-players round-robin tournament.

The day provided just one decisive game with Wei Yi cashing in on his new-found form to beat Shankland. Anish played out a draw with Dai Van, David Navara came back from a much worse position to hold Keymer, while Le signed the peace with Gurel Ediz.

This was the third Classical game between Praggnanadhaa and Aravindh but the result did not change. Aravindh, playing black, decided not to push Pragg in to complexities and his Berlin defense was simply an easy guess to get a level position right through.

Monday is lone rest day in both sections and battle will resume from Tuesday. *—PTI*

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa with fellow Indian Aravindh Chithambaram PHOTO: X

Assam defeated Bihar 2-1 in a Division B match PHOTO: X

Assam beat Bihar in National Hockey C'ship

PANCHKULA, 3 MARCH

Assam defeated Bihar 2-1 in a Division B match of the 15th Hockey India Senior Women National Championship at the Tau Devi Lal stadium.

After a tightly contested first quarter, Assam broke the deadlock right before halftime with captain Munmuni Das (29th minute) successfully converting a penalty corner and then Khushboo Prajapati (59th) converted another set piece to double their lead.

Bihar scored a consolation goal in the 60th minute through Nusrat Khatoon.

In a Division C match on Sunday, Andhra Pradesh recorded a 4-2 win against Jammu and Kashmir.

Revathi Thalari (3th, 17th) scored a brace for her side while Harathi Lomada (36th) and Madugula Bhavani (45th) also contributed with the goals for Andhra Pradesh. Rajni (10th) and Anju Kumari (57th) were the scorers for Jammu and Kashmir.

In the last Division C match on Sunday, Puducherry enjoyed a dominant 6-1 win over Arunachal in Pool B.

Jayaprtha S (13th, 39th, 41st) scored a hat-trick for Puducherry while B Deepika (4th, 22nd) and S Subasri (40th) also found the net for the winners. *—PTI*

INDIA'S INIYAN WINS CANNES OPEN CHESS

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

Indian Grandmaster Pa Iniyan won the Cannes International Open, defeating compatriot V Pranesh in the ninth and final round in Cannes, France.

Iniyan ended the tournament on 7.5 points, a half point more than Delhi-based International Master Aradhya Garg, who finished second.

Matching Garg on seven points was reigning World junior champion Kazybek Noderbek of Kazakhstan, who had to be content with the third place following a tie-break.

Iniyan remained undefeated through the course of the tournament scoring six wins and three draws.

The Indian picked up the necessary steam in the last three rounds winning one game after another and his most crucial victory was over Garg in the penultimate round.

The 38th edition of the open tournament ended on Sunday and witnessed a participation of 147 players from 25 countries. *—PTI*

SA Open: Sharma finishes tied, Naidoo makes history

DURBAN, 3 MARCH

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma faltered with a four-over 76 in the third round, finishing tied for 58th at the Investec South African Open, which was shortened to 54 holes due to rain.

Sharma (66-72-76) had been tied for 4th after the opening round, but that remained the only bright spot in a week that ended prematurely at the Durban Country Club.

Meanwhile, Dylan Naidoo made history by becoming the first South African player of colour to win.

With Naidoo and England's Laurie Canter tied for the lead on 14-under par after three rounds, a deluge of rain on Sunday forced the cancellation of the final round.

It was then decided that the two of them would settle this year's championship in a play-off on the par-four 18th.

And with the weight of history resting on his young shoulders, Naidoo stood tall as he made the birdie on the first playoff hole that shook South African golf history.

The victory secures Naidoo a DP World Tour card and he also claimed one of the three spots on offer for The Open at Royal Portrush this July on a magical Sunday.

South Africa's Darren Fichardt and England's Marco Penge were the other two players to also secure a place in The Open through the Investec Open's status as part of Open Qualifying Series. *—PTI*

Barcelona routs 10-man Real Sociedad 4-0

MADRID, 3 MARCH

Barcelona cruised to a 4–0 rout of 10-man Real Sociedad to regain the lead in Spain.

Gerard Martín, Marc Casadó, Ronald Araujo and Robert Lewandowski scored a goal each on Sunday to put Barcelona one point ahead of second-placed Atletico Madrid at the top of the Spanish league.

"We have to keep fighting until the end because we want to win everything we can."

Barcelona is three points ahead of third-placed Real Madrid, which lost 2–1 at Real Betis on Saturday, when Atletico beat Athletic Bilbao 1–0 at home. *—PTI*

Messi picks team for World Cup

BUENOS AIRES, 3 MARCH

Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni has selected a preliminary list of 33 players led by Lionel Messi for South American qualifying matches against Uruguay and Brazil.

One of the bright young talents in a revamped squad is striker Claudio Echeverri, who has just joined Manchester City after having played in the South American Under-20 championships.

Other players who are not yet 21 – Nicolás Paz, Benjamín Domínguez and Santiago Castro – were included in the squad announced on Sunday.

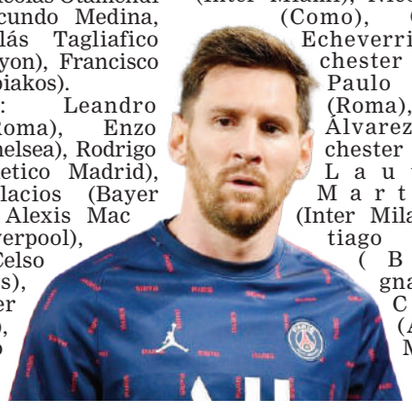
Squad:

Goalkeepers: Emiliano Martínez (Aston Villa), Gerónimo Rulli (Olympique Marseille), Walter Benítez (PSV Eindhoven)

Defenders: Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid), Gonzalo Montiel (River Plate), Cristian Romero (Tottenham), Germán Pezzella (River Plate), Leonardo Balerdi (Olympique Marseille), Juan Foyth (Villarreal), Nicolás Otamendi (Benfica), Facundo Medina, (Lens), Nicolás Tagliafico (Olympique Lyon), Francisco Ortega (Olympiakos).

Midfielders: Leandro Paredes (Roma), Enzo Fernández (Chelsea), Rodrigo de Paul (Atletico Madrid), Exequiel Palacios (Bayer Leverkusen), Alexis Mac Allister (Liverpool), Giovani Lo Celso (Real Betis), Máximo Perrone (Como), Giuliano Simeone (Atletico Madrid), Benjamín Domínguez (Bologna), Thiago Almada (Olympique Lyon).

Forwards: Alejandro Garnacho (Manchester United), Nicolás González (Juventus), Lionel Messi (Inter Miami), Nicolás Paz (Como), Claudio Echeverri (Manchester City), Paulo Dybala (Roma), Julián Álvarez (Manchester City), Lautaro Martínez (Inter Milan), Santiago Castro (Bologna),Ángel Correa (Atletico Madrid). *—PTI*



IPL OPENER ON 22 MARCH

Ajinkya Rahane appointed as KKR captain ahead of IPL

NEW DELHI, 3 MARCH

India batter Ajinkya Rahane will captain defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders in the Indian Premier League beginning on 22 March, the franchise announced on Monday.

Rahane replaces Shreyas Iyer as the skipper with the latter tasked to lead Punjab Kings this season.

Venkatesh Iyer, who has been with KKR for a long time, has been made Rahane's deputy.

"It's an honour to be asked to lead KKR, which has been one of the most successful franchises in the IPL. I think we have an excellent and balanced squad. I look forward to working with everyone and taking up the challenge of defending our title," said Rahane in a statement.

Defending champions KKR will face Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the IPL opener at the Eden Gardens on 22 March.

Rahane replaces Shreyas Iyer as KKR skipper, with the latter set to lead Punjab Kings this season. Iyer and KKR had surprisingly parted ways after a triumphant campaign in the last edition.

Meanwhile, three-time IPL champions KKR have officially registered three stars around the Gemini constellation, each symbolizing their title victories in 2012 (Korbo), 2014 (Lorbo), and 2024 (Jeetbo).

On a clear night, the stars can be viewed using the coordinates, or by scanning a QR code.

"The stars have been registered by the date that we won each of the three titles - 27th May 2012, 1st June 2014 and 26th May 2024," said Binda Dey, Chief Marketing Officer of KKR in a release.

The three stars named after KKR's longstanding motto Korbo (Play), Lorbo (Fight) and Jeetbo (Win) serve as an everlasting homage to the team's championship-legacy. *—PTI*

Man United lost FA Cup, but coach eyes PL win

MANCHESTER, 3 MARCH

Manchester United crashed out of the FA Cup on Sunday after losing on penalties to Fulham. However, rather than bemoan the latest blow in a miserable season, coach Ruben Amorim insisted his sights were set on a bigger trophy.

"The goal is to win the Premier League (PL). So I know that we are losing games and losing trophies during this season, but the goal is to win the Premier League again," Amorim said after the 4-3 shootout loss at Old Trafford.

"I don't know how long it's going to take. But that is our goal. If you think like that, we can suffer a little bit in these defeats – a lot sometimes – but we have a goal, so we continue, no matter what, we continue forward."

Cup holder United was sent spinning out in the fifth round as Victor Lindelof and Joshua Zirkzee saw spot kicks saved after the game ended 1-1 following extra time.

Fulham goalkeeper Bernd Leno was the hero with the crucial stops that set up a quarterfinal match against Crystal Palace.

It took a second-half equalizer from Bruno Fernandes to send the game to extra time after Calvin Bassey headed Fulham in front just before the break.

But it proved a temporary reprieve for United, which now has just one trophy to aim for this season – the Europa League. *—PTI*